

No. 19

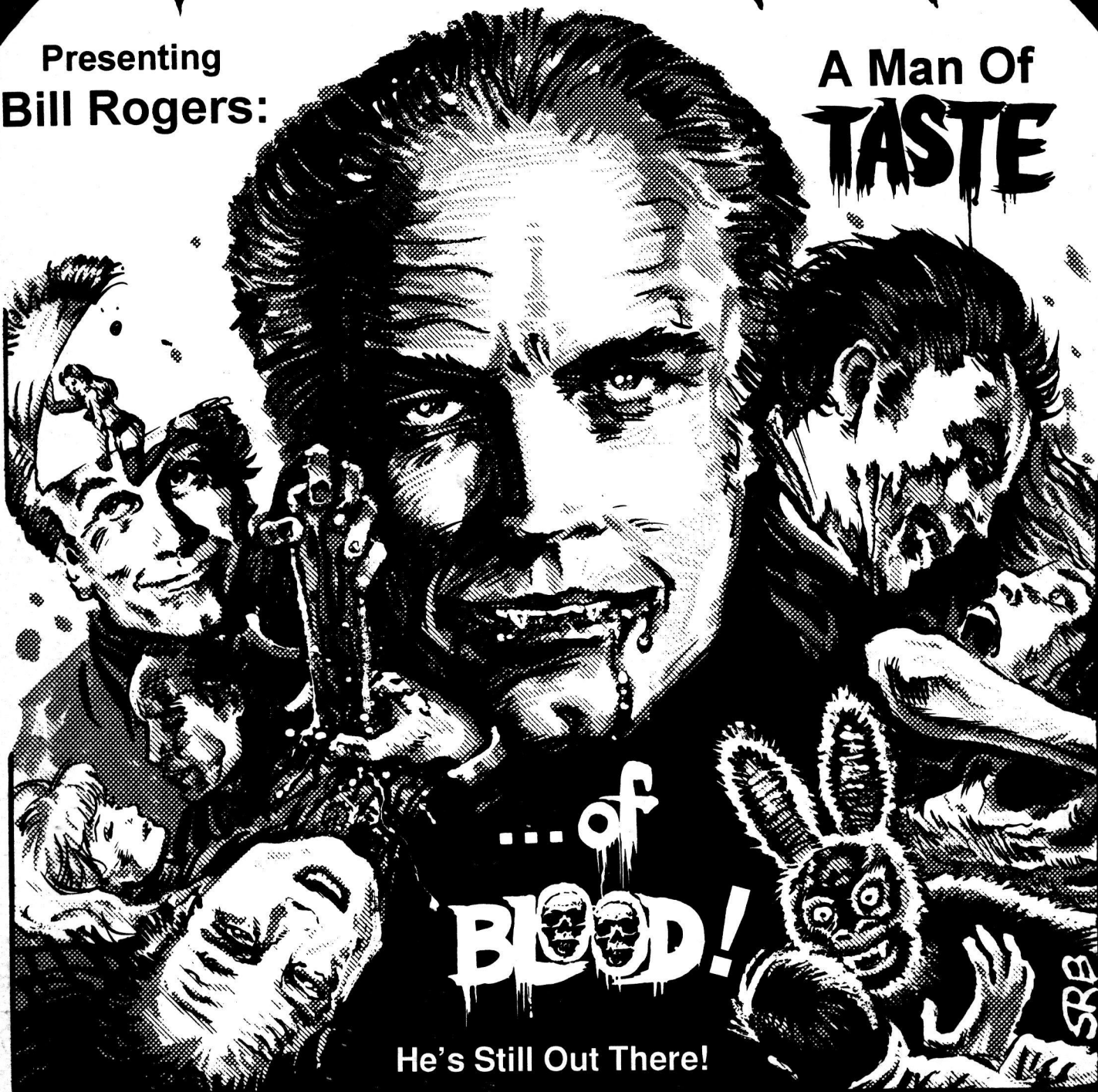
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Bill Rogers:

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...of
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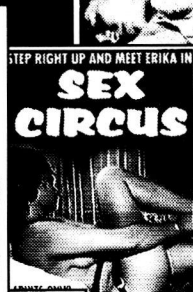
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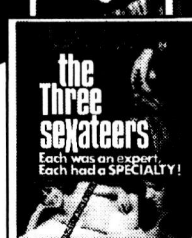
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after the
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BLONDE ON A BUM TRIP (1968 • b&w)

A sick look at the sick side of New York's hippie scene (drugs, sex, more drugs & sex). It's hard to believe this mindwarper was shot within a year of Woodstock! Recommended.

SCARE THEIR PANTS OFF (1968 • b&w)

A dose of depravity only DISTRIBPIX could dish out! Several women are subjected to the fantastically twisted whims of a couple horny but jaded evildoers. Sick fun!

LUST WEEKEND (1967 • b&w) Mind-boggling sex/horror flick that puts a married couple into the wicked clutches of a sadistic sex cult. And that's just where the fun begins!

SATAN'S BED (1966 • b&w) What separates this roughie from others like it is the star—YOKO ONO (!) which (we guess) makes this an "art" film...

THE BIZARRE ONES (1967 • b&w) Come join us on a carefree romp with the voluptuous Dieder as she engages in dastardly deeds with a variety of degenerates.

FELICIA (1969 • b&w) Felicia's perverse, anything-goes sex life leaves her twisting on Satan's fork. Grittier than raw cornmeal!

FRUSTRATED CHERIE (1968 • b&w) When a middle-aged man loses the lead in his pencil (due to astrological reasons!), his ripe young bride finds greener pastures.

HOW MANY TIMES (1968 • b&w) Rick & Angela use devious & evil means to collect their own "harem" of sex slaves...and then all Hell breaks loose!

QUICK TURN OVER (1969 • color) A group of swingers start out with mild experimentation, but the sex turns real bizarre real quick!

ROOM AND BROAD (1967 • b&w) For some, the price of room & broad can be very high! A perfect Times Square low-life sex flick.

THE MARRIAGE DROPOUTS (1969 • b&w)

4 guys flashback on the sleazy (& goofy) reasons why their marriages tailed.

THE BED... AND HOW TO MAKE IT! (1966 • b&w)

The sexual intrigue runs rampant when some perverts and their victims cross paths at a wild motel. Stand-out sexploitation from JOE SARNO.

SEX CIRCUS (1969 • b&w) This aptly-titled slime-fest won't let up (or let you down)! Some funny & truly sick twists on the usual pervo fare.

ONCE OVER NIGHTLY (1968 • color) A peek into Dr. Dan's medical practice reveals a catalog of carnality. Directed by ANDREA TRUE.

ALL MY MEN (1966 • b&w)

We're treated to a twisted tour de force as a prostitute reveals her past to a psychiatrist

TO TURN A TRICK (1967 • b&w)

As her life spirals out of control, Inger stops at nothing in her search for thrills!

SKIN DEEP IN LOVE (1965 • b&w) Mark is a handsome magician whose off-stage trick is making the clothing (& morals) of women disappear! Another mind-blowing masterpiece from JOE SARNO!

THE PROCURER (1968 • b&w) Wilson operated his own "school of love" where he treated the graduates cheap, but sold them expensive!

THIGH SPY (1967 • b&w) The murder runs cold & the lust runs hot when an artist becomes involved with some ruthless secret agents.

ANYTHING FOR MONEY (1967 • b&w) In this slick sicko, there's no limit to what these nasty folks'll do for a buck! More greatness from JOE SARNO.

SURFSIDE SEX (1967 • b&w)

Disenchanted youth, LSD & wild sex in a flick that could've been titled "Sleazy Rider"!

NYMPHO (1967 • b&w)

You won't say "No" to this sleaze-fest about a gal who could only say "Yes"!

FOUR ON THE FLOOR (1968 • b&w) Priscilla experiences a sexual wake-up call when she partakes in some very weird party games.

AFTER THE BALL WAS OVER (1969 • b&w)

Life among the beautiful people turns ugly for a wealthy playgirl on the prowl.

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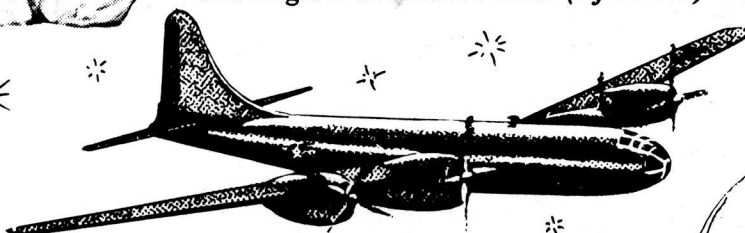
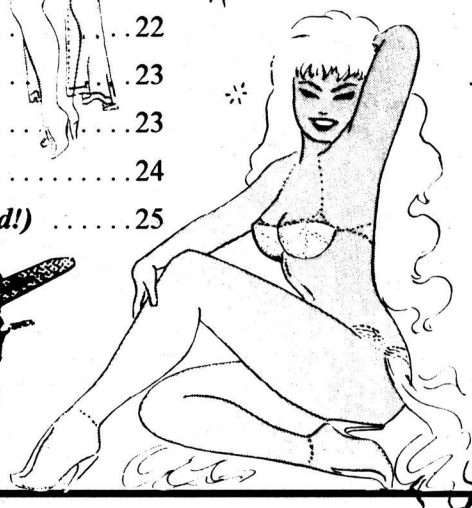


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FRONT COVER: The "B" Movies of Bill Rogers by Stephen R. Bissette.

CONTENTS PAGE: Drawings by Bill Rogers.

BACK COVER: Photograph by Bill Rogers.



Welcome to **ecco**, the world of bizarre video. With this, the nineteenth issue, **ecco** is changing its publishing schedule from quarterly to biannual (which has unofficially been the schedule for the past several years anyway).

The impact of switching from quarterly to biannual should be minimal; those of you who recently subscribed for one year will find that your subscription is now good for two. Those of you who re-upped for two years will probably be killed in a horrible accident before your subscription expires. But most importantly, the content and editorial stance will remain unchanged.

Speaking of editorial stance, mine of last issue - particularly the dismissal of **Mystery Science Theater 3000** and a blunt invitation to certain **Lackluster**, er, **Blockbuster Video** members - roused several readers who subsequently voiced their dissent by mail. Alright! In the interest of presenting all sides of the issue, here's a sampling of the letters we received.

Letters

Charles Kilgore:

Today I was looking through my local magazine store and I discovered a copy of **ecco**, issue No. 18. Since I enjoy bizarre video's (sic) I decided to spend the three dollars and buy it. I also read the editors (sic) note in the front that you wrote to familiarize myself with your magazine.

It was cool up to a point. I agreed with what you said about "head" movies. There should be more of them in the local video stores such as **Blockbuster**, a store that I went to once and have never returned to. I also believe that **Blockbuster** is almost criminal in its obsessed drive to wipe out alternative videos. I, however, will support **Blockbusters** (sic) right to not carry videos they find objectionable. I do not like their decision, or support their decision, however they do have the right not to carry them.

I also found your opinion on **Mystery Science Theater 3000** distasteful. While reading this paragraph I was reminded of the previous paragraph in which you explained to the bohemian why to (sic) liked "head" movies. I gathered that it reminded you of your youth and that is also why I like **Mystery Science Theater 3000**. When I was younger my friends, dates, co-workers, fellow students would make wise cracks at the films. In so doing, we often learned more about the thought processes of my friends, dates, co-workers, fellow students than the movie itself.

Because I am an open minded person I read on to see if your (sic) had anything intelligent to say. Then I came across you (sic) statement which prompted this letter, "If you drive past independently owned video stored (sic) or less fascistic outlets (such as **West Coast**, **Tower**, or smaller regional chains) on your way to **blockbuster** (sic), I don't want you to read this magazine. In fact, you can go fuck yourself." then (sic) the smug, ass like (???) comment, "Of course I mean that in a nice way."

If you were an intellectual you would realize that insulting your readers who use **Blockbuster** is only a way to reduce your own credibility. You will never gain the credibility to destroy **Blockbuster** no matter how loud you scream, or how many people you insult. The only way to win over **Blockbuster** is to

rally all who agree with you, and really care, then either buy them out, or just by (sic) enough stock in the company (if their [sic] corporate) to become a major voting member. The hippie protests of the sixties did not work and neither will you writing you (sic) opinions (after all you know what they say about opinions).

So now I will not read your magazine **ecco**, and I will tell my friends, dates, co-workers, fellow students not to read you (sic) magazine.

If I see anyone mention this magazine in any newspaper, magazine, book, pamphlet, video, or television broadcast I will wright (sic) them and tell them how much of an ignoramus you are. In fact you can go fuck yourself. Of course I mean that in a nice way.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Osborne
East Hampton, NY

Dear Michael:

I don't understand how anyone who takes offense at reading "go fuck yourself" could enjoy watching exploitation movies (the cinematic equivalent of "go fuck yourself"), much less want to read a fanzine. Listen to your impulses...ecco is not for you.

As for your reference to fellow students: I'm not Criswell, but could that class be Remedial English 001? Your brief letter demonstrated not only poor spelling (don't you live near a dictionary?) but also a lack of familiarity with the basic rules of punctuation. You might try opening your textbooks more and tuning in to MST3000 less.

Dear Charles:

I'm enclosing this letter along with my check for renewing my subscription to **ecco** to let you know how much I'm enjoying your publication and also to address a couple of topics you brought up in Issue Number 18's "The **ecco Chamber**." I'm glad someone has started taking **Blockbuster** to task for their cowardly stand on NC-17 movies. There's a really frightening wave of hardcore knee-jerk extremism coming just over the

horizon for film lovers, and just because we don't hear about it on the news every night doesn't mean it's not coming any faster and won't be any more damaging. Michael Medved's family values crusade is an excellent example; a friend recently sent me an article from a British magazine stating how his theories have caught on in the U.K., which is like rubbing salt in the wound. Please continue to inform your readers about this nightmare.

I think you're being a little hard on **Mystery Science Theater 3000**. (This may have blown any credibility the body of my letter may have established.) I saw a backlash coming a few years ago when the show started and someone wrote to **Psychotronic Video** to complain. Look, I can understand, no one likes something they love to be ridiculed, and I like to consider myself a dedicated, life-long student and defender of B-movies, but this is just a comedy show. I really don't think the program is trying to force people to enjoy the films they satirize in a different way -- psychotronic fans are a stubborn lot, and I don't think a television program with a sleepy comedian and two puppets is going to erase fond memories of **Bride Of The Monster** or **It Conquered The World** for them. I love both of these films, but I also enjoy the **MST3000** versions as well, along with the majority of their shows. I know this is heresy in the eyes of purists, but to raise the roof over a harmless show like this strikes me as, well, a bit anal. I agree with you that a truly daring series would target cinematic junk like **Body of Evidence** or **Indecent Proposal**, but I don't think the show's object is to be daring, or needs to be. It succeeds at being a humorous diversion, which isn't such a bad thing at all.

Well, now that I've sentenced this slightly-more-than-brief letter to the trash heap, I want to close by again saying how much I'm enjoying **ecco** and looking forward to future issues as impressive as the last four. I doubt if that covers my ass, but thanks nonetheless.

Sincerely,

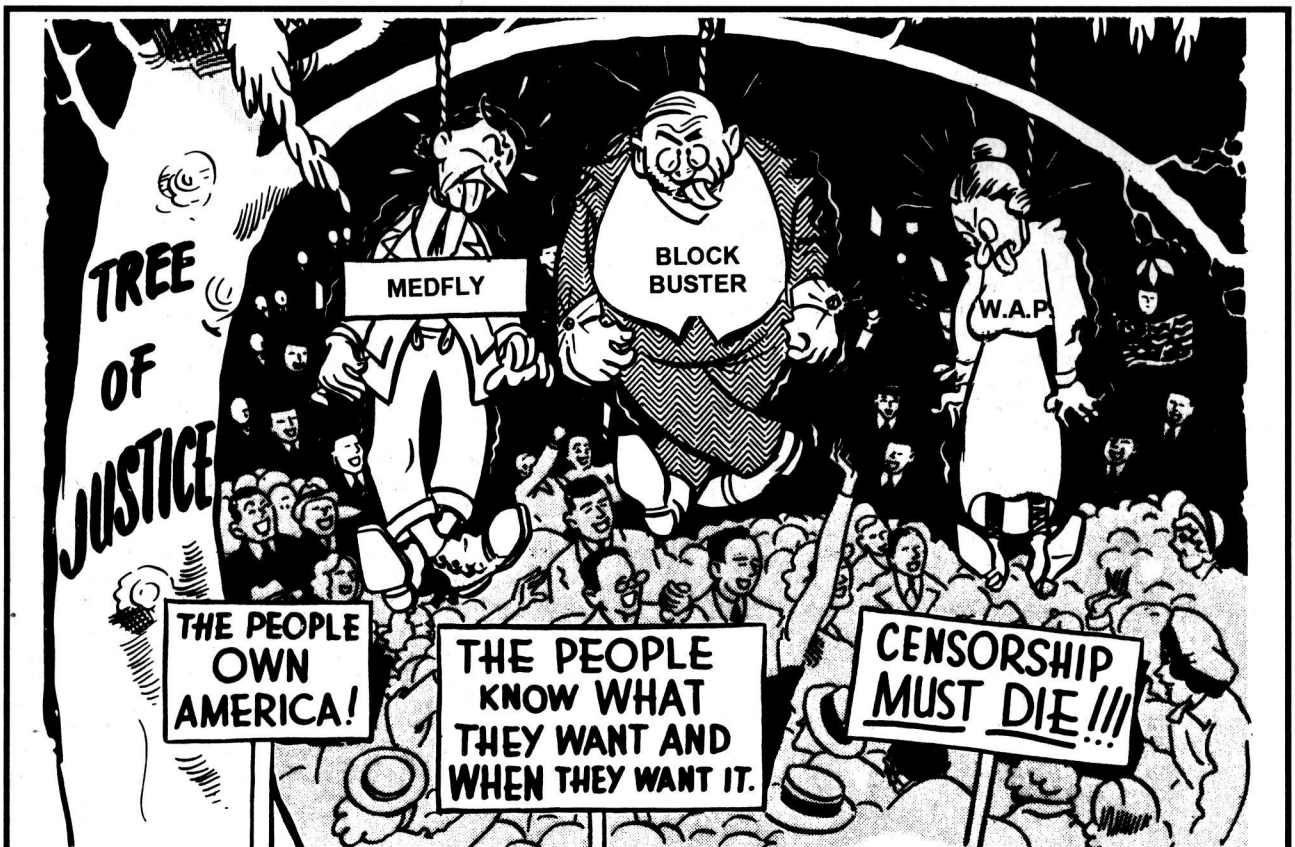
Paul B. Gaita
Walpole, MA

*[Editor's note: This represents about half of Paul's hefty letter, in which he also mentions that a Walpole Blockbuster outlet stocks Woody Allen's **Night And Fog**, a title that a Blockbuster weasel, er, spokesperson had formerly declared would not be offered by the chain.]*

Dear Paul:

No, **MST3000** isn't a threat to B movies in any way (as a matter of fact, even those nauseating Medved books helped introduce a new audience to the joys of cinema maudit). Still, I prefer the sincerity and unintentional laughs of the films themselves. Somehow a little boy responding to a ridiculous space monster's threats by taunting, "You look like a pooped-out pinwheel" is funnier than anything on **MST3000**. Also, keep in mind that you've apparently seen the original versions, an advantage over most of **MST3000**'s viewers.

A promise: this is the last time you'll read about **MST3000** in **ecco**. But beware! **MST3000** Mania is coming soon to a convention near you, no matter how loud I scream.



ABOVE: This illustration, borrowed from Kroger Babb's pressbook for **Karamoja** (and doctored up a bit), sums up our own opinion of self-appointed censors. Sic semper tyrannis!

Charles:

Enclosed is a photocopy of the cover and (lead) article from the April 26 issue of **Video Store** magazine (about **Blockbuster**'s chairman, Wayne Huizenga). Yech! I have to get this rag in my mail...I would've preferred a letter bomb. Your editorial was right on! I'm fuckin' up **Blockbuster**'s plans in my area - I was here first and got the best location. They're down the street in a bad spot. I've heard they're jealous of my spot. Boo hoo hoo! Most people don't know what they're missing 'cause they don't know what's **not** at **Blockbuster**. That's where you come in. Keep finding obscurities.

Thanks,

Fred Frey, El Presidente
112 Video, Medford, NY

Dear Fred:

*I always love to hear about another independent store owner giving **Blockbuster** a run for their money and wish you the best of luck with 112 Video, but don't hold your breath waiting for Michael J. Osborne to sign up.*

Thanks to everyone who's dropped us a line lately; we can't repeat too often that we want letters (even critical ones, for they enable us to improve coverage, correct our mistakes, or, at worst, be amused).

P(s)alm Greasing

Media dweeb and **Sneak Previews** co-host Michael Medved, no stranger to these pages, was the subject of an illuminating article in the August '93 issue of **Spy** magazine. Writers Rodney Gibbs and Jane Craig dug up the dirt on Medved's fruitful relationship with the program's sponsors, uncovering a cesspool of complicity that Medved would probably have preferred kept undercover.

Specifically, Gibbs and Craig reveal how **Sneak Previews**, a low-profile movie review program that failed to receive funding from its own parent public television network, Chicago's WTTW, came to be co-funded by several far-right think tanks for the family values crowd. Another sponsor, Digital Equipment Corporation founder Kenneth Olsen, is financially involved with The Idea Agency, a Christian-oriented entertainment company. According to Gibbs and Craig, the latter provides publicity for **Sneak Previews** free of charge in exchange for previewing - one week in advance - each half-hour episode of the program. Former **Previews** staffers suspect that the "publicity" is a ruse, and that the episodes are actually being reviewed for content by the Agency.

For his share of the bargain, Medved provided ebullient reviews for **McGee & Me**, a christian kiddie tale produced by - who else? - The Idea Agency. Medved also uses his **Sneak Previews** soapbox to praise inferior films with obvious moral messages (**Billy Bathgate**) over more successfully realized features with complex allegiances (say, **Goodfellas**). In his book **Hollywood vs America**, he advocates a return to the days of the film industry's self-censorship under Joseph Breen.

Our response here at **ecco** is one of both surprise and amusement. Who would have guessed that such a lame, poorly rated program would be the recipient of a big-money lift from fundamentalism's financial muscle, and on formerly liberal-biased public television at that! Such dealings serve to illuminate potential alliances behind Medved's rumored bid for a congressional seat. Meanwhile, The Idea Agency and others protect Medved's bully pulpit at WTTW from suffering the fate of most unpopular television fare: cancellation.

Men or Mice?

While Medved hammers Hollywood filmmakers for failing to reflect what he considers traditional family values, recent years have seen a greater diversity of complaints levelled against Tinseltown. Along with the usual attacks from fundamentalist watchdog groups, the industry now faces criticism from the left. As filmmakers are currently being blamed for everything from the illegitimate birth rate to the spread of AIDS by the frothing right, left-wing policy groups censure Hollywood for its violence, its racist stereotypes, and its "incorrect" thinking.

Several studios have rallied behind their filmmakers: Universal Studios stood their ground in releasing Martin Scorsese's **The Last Temptation Of Christ** in spite of a threatened boycott by angry fundamentalists, most of whom had not actually seen the film. Similarly, Tri-Star refused to change the script of **Basic Instinct** to suit the demands of a gay activist group.

Then there's the spineless bean counters at Walt Disney Productions who censored their own recent release **The Program** after several teenagers imitated one of the film's scenes with fatal consequences. National news picked up the story of the student who was killed as he and his friends, inspired by the scene in question, stretched out in the middle of a darkened highway late at night to test their courage. Unlike in the movie, a driver failed to spot them in time.

The death is unfortunate, but Disney's decision to excise the footage is pathetic at best. One wonders if the young daredevil would have caught his jacket sleeve while playing "chicken" after a late broadcast of **Rebel Without A Cause**, or strapped on a giant fan and rollerskates *a la* Wile E. Coyote after catching a Roadrunner cartoon. Let's face it: bored teens don't need Jeffrey Katzenberg to tell them how to kill themselves.

Katzenberg himself faced a holy war when a representative from the Arab Anti-Defamation League charged the studio with expressing anti-Moslem sentiments in last year's animated feature **Aladdin**. Nervous studio execs hurriedly commissioned alternate lyrics for the introductory song for **Aladdin**'s home video release. Here are Howard Ashman and Tim Rice's original lyrics:

Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place/Where the caravan camels roam/Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face/It's barbaric but, hey, it's home.

Now here are the lyrics as they appear on the video:

Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place/Where the caravan camels roam/Where it's flat and immense/and the heat is intense/It's barbaric but, hey, it's home.

Why are the original lyrics considered so offensive? The events in **Aladdin** occur further back in time than the violent westerns that vividly illustrate mythological U.S. history to viewers from Europe to the East. (For example: how did Americans react to Sergio Leone's violent, revisionist westerns? Aside from milquetoast Janet Maslin of **The New York Times**, we loved 'em.) And why are U.S. filmmakers singled out to be arbiters of political correctness? Several years ago, a controversial film from Egypt depicted author Salman Rushdie as an evil demon with supernatural powers. Rushdie, still living in solitude because of the bounty on his head for his alleged blaspheming of Allah in **The Satanic Verses**, didn't dare come out of hiding to seek damages. Four persons involved with publishing or distributing **The Satanic Verses** have already been murdered by extremists.

Curiously, no complaint was issued about the character of Aladdin himself, reportedly modeled after "actor" Tom Cruise and looking about as Arabic as Lyle Lovett. *Aladdin* is a Western-looking hero in a tale about Arabian villains, which seems more xenophobic than the fanciful intimations of brutality that angered the League.

Disney execs did stand their ground against the League's proposed changes to a segment in which the princess, disguised as a commoner, is threatened with the loss of her hand for stealing an apple from a merchant. Under Islamic law, claimed outraged League reps, a hand would not be amputated for the mere theft of an apple. On the other hand, Amnesty International reports that in 1992, eight prisoners in Saudi Arabia had their right hands severed at the wrist for unspecified reasons. Maybe they stole two apples. Those short-handed eight fared better than the 66 men who were publicly beheaded during the same year for such crimes as drug dealing and sexual offenses. In light of these grim statistics, modern-day Saudi Arabia isn't quite the "whole new world" its defenders champion. If Disney is willing to bend to such an obvious public relations ploy from propagandists, maybe John Demjanjuk should bring suit against the studio for depicting the Third Reich as the heavies in last year's flop movie *Swing Kids*. How about it, ACLU?

Whitewashing History

Misguided racial sensitivity seems to be the reason for the gutting of the Goodtimes Video release of the 1943 serialization of *Batman*. The original serial, made the year following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, is a vicious chunk of anti-Japanese propaganda intended to inspire support for and among our own troops. The principal villain, an evil Japanese mobster named Prince Dhaka (J. Carrol Naish), operates a den of traitors from inside a secret room in a ride-through funhouse.

Throughout the serial's fifteen chapters, characters sputter anti-Japanese rhetoric that is, to be sure, irresponsible and offensive. The first chapter, "*The Electric Brain*," depicted a deserted neighborhood in the U.S. as the narrator, eschewing subtlety, intoned that "this was part of a foreign land transplanted bodily to America and known as Little Tokyo. Since a wise government rounded up the shifty-eyed Japs, it has become virtually a ghost street." Later, the narrator refers to the villain Dhaka as "a sinister Jap spy," apparently for the benefit of slow-witted viewers who hadn't yet caught on. The anti-Japanese (and ultimately anti-Asian) slurs continue to the final episode.

The racist diatribes are missing in the two-tape Goodtimes Video release, either excised entirely or clumsily overdubbed with innocuous dialogue. ecco compared a tape of the original serial with the censored Goodtimes version. Here are a few examples of what's been changed:

Original Version: "Anyway, I'm not afraid of him or any other squirt eye."

Goodtimes Version: "Anyway, I'm not afraid of him or any other hoodlum."

Original Version: "I'm fed up with your Jap new order anyhow."

Goodtimes Version: "I'm fed up with your damn new order anyhow." (In 1943, "damn" would not have been used in a film intended for children, as was *Batman*.)

Original Version: "That's the kind of answer that fits the color of your skin." (Spoken by a Caucasian gangster, meaning "yellow.")

Goodtimes Version: "That's the kind of answer that made you the hood you are."

These examples illustrate how the serial's propagandistic content has been obliterated. But by who: Columbia Pictures, which owns the rights to the original serial, or Goodtimes Video, the licensee? Cynics may suspect Columbia Pictures, now owned by the Sony Corporation. Although Sony's intervention is indeed possible, this poorly executed patch-up work was more likely intended to hide American wartime hate-mongering, which included not only this serial and dozens of short subjects but also the shameful internment of innocent U.S. citizens of Japanese descent. We can only speculate, for our phone calls to both Columbia Pictures and Goodtimes Video were not returned. A final note: the original version, propaganda intact, is available as a mail-order rental from the Video Vault. Call 1-800-VAULT-66.

Movie buffs of the nation's capitol were in for a shock last year when the tiny Mary Pickford Theater, located within the Library of Congress, cancelled a showing of D.W. Griffith's silent epic *The Birth Of A Nation* for fear that its undeniably racist perspective might offend some patrons. The decision offended this former patron, who believes that Griffith's Civil War epic is - despite its gross prejudices - a work of cinematic art that surpasses the vast majority of films screened at the theater. But unlike the June 1989 Robert Mapplethorpe incident at the Corcoran Gallery, in which an exhibit of the late photographer's works (which included several explicit images of homosexual sexplay) was cancelled out of concern that the NEA would be held culpable, no public outcry has been reported. One suspects that the film scholars who could (and should) defend Griffith's film have failed to speak up for fear of being labeled racists. America's Sweetheart must be spinning in her grave over the cowardice behind this decision. With respect to the late Ms. Pickford, we suggest that the Library change its screening room's name to the Will Hays Memorial Theater.

Last October, cable's The Discovery Channel cancelled a second showing of *The Wonderful World Of Dung*, a documentary about, well, feces and its significance in world culture. An ecco correspondent contacted Discovery Channel headquarters to find out why the program was cancelled. An apologetic representative blamed the unwillingness of sponsors to attach their name to a show about crap. Nevertheless, the Discovery rep conceded that the cancellation had sparked a new record for call-in protests. Whether the show was pulled for sponsor reticence or not, the heavy viewer response lends credence to the familiar complaint that there ain't shit on television nowadays.

This Issue...

...marks the ecco debut of writer Erich Mees, a long-time subscriber from Dunwoody, Georgia, which is about twenty miles northeast of Atlanta. We also welcome the return of Howard Clarke, who's back with a reappraisal of two Roman Polanski classics of psychological horror. On the art front, we'd like to thank illustrator Scot D. Ryerson for his banner design for this column. And don't forget artist/writer/lecturer Stephen R. Bissette's review of a new book about the Florida film industry, scratched out while Steve was on location in the Sunshine State. He also designed and inked our cover, a collage of images from the low-budget features of Bill Rogers.

And while I'm being so grateful, I'd like to thank the following for their help in putting this issue together: Doug Chapman, Eileen Flynn, David F. Friedman, Craig Ledbetter, Herschell Gordon Lewis, Tim and Donna Lucas, Jim and Jane McCabe, Bill Rogers, Dan Sonney, Sam Stetson, Charles Tanqueray & Co., and Mike Vraney.

Note to H.H.: I'll wager that most village idiots know that "ignorant" is not a noun. Perhaps you meant "ignoramus."

Crackin' Spines

As obscure feature films keep finding their way onto home video, books about practically any angle of the filmmaking industry keep popping up on the shelves of vendors. It seems as though everyone who has ever read a film book has also written one. Yet sometimes more means less, as the following reviews will attest. Let the buyer beware!

Leftovers

Devotees of offbeat exploitation movies certainly must share my frustration with the vast majority of film reference books. Telephone book-thick tomes by the late Leslie Halliwell, James Monaco, Ephraim Katz, and others inevitably omit filmographies by Joe Sarno, Doris Wishman, the Findlays, and the rest of cinema's netherworld in favor of the same tired credits for every Hollywood bigshot from Frank Capra to Ron Howard. Who needs such widely available information, anyway? I'm usually searching for facts about some exploitation filmmaker whose obscurity makes Larry Buchanan look like one of the majors.

The good news for exploitation fans is the recent (December 1993) publication of **Down And Dirty: Hollywood's Exploitation Filmmakers And Their Movies** by Mike Quarles (McFarland Books). The bad news is that Quarles has primarily relied on previously published articles by himself and others for his research. More bad news: casual readers of such magazines as **Video Watchdog** or **Cult Movies** may know more about the subject than Quarles apparently does.

In **Down and Dirty**, fourteen exploitation filmmakers or distributors are each given their own brief chapter; other chapters are dedicated to such relevant topics as trailer compilations, homemade exploitation (Super 8mm filmmakers such as Mark Pirro), and big-time filmmakers who started out making exploitation movies. The book concludes with a brief mention of eight additional filmmakers.

Although the book may prove informative to a neophyte, those who will most be compelled to read **Down And Dirty** will discover that Quarles has served up leftovers. How many true-blue exploitation fans don't already know that Francis Ford Coppola worked on several nudies before directing **Dementia 13** for Roger Corman, or that Jayne Mansfield appeared nude in **Promises Promises**? Quarles treats these tidbits as major revelations. His chapters on both Kroger Babb and David F. Friedman seem to be cribbed from the latter's **Youth In Babylon**, a far better book.

Elsewhere, Quarles omits information that can be readily gleaned from commonly available sources. In his chapter on Andy Milligan, he states that if Milligan "...went through the typical course of making short experimental films beforehand, there is no proof of it today." One such film, **Vapors**, is not only known among Milligan fans but is available on home video. Quarles also states that "Milligan's filmmaking career continues to this day." Milligan died of AIDS three years ago. In his chapter on filmmakers not covered by their own section, Quarles discusses Steve Hawkes, the co-director of the ludicrous horror film **Blood Freak**, claiming that the latter title is Hawkes' "only known film." Regular readers of **Psychotronic Video** know that Hawkes portrayed "Zan," a Tarzan-based character, in Manuel Cano's **King Of The Jungle** (1969). No mention is made of Brad Grinter, who co-directed, co-produced, and acted in **Blood Freak**, and whose checkered career in exploitation movies is far more interesting than Hawkes' limited output.

What saves **Down And Dirty** from being totally worthless is the fact that it has few competitors. Although it may be found in any number of film magazines and fanzines, most of Quarles' "research" is appearing for the first time in hardcover

format. But that will be little consolation for anyone who purchases **Down And Dirty**. I could discuss Quarles' amateurish writing style or the illustrations that seem to be copied from **Sinister Cinema** ads, but what's the use. **Down And Dirty** is, alas, a major disappointment.

[**Down And Dirty** is available for \$31.95 postpaid from McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640.]

Orange Polishing by Stephen R. Bissette

(writing from the Elephant's Graveyard, Florida)

The back cover of James Ponti's cursory overview of filmmaking in sunny Florida, **Hollywood East: Florida's Fabulous Flicks** (Tribune Publishing, P.O. Box 1100, Orlando, FL 32802), promises "a fascinating glimpse behind the scenes of more than 125 movies made in Florida," but ecco readers will definitely be disappointed with the roster. The operative word here is "Hollywood," friends -- forget about **Blood Feast**, **Blood Freak**, **Scream Baby Scream**, **Death Curse Of Tartu**, or the Florida rogue's gallery that would make this book truly of interest. Even Ivan Tors gets short shrift here to make room for **Absence Of Malice**, **My Girl**, **Cape Fear** (the remake), **The Greatest Show On Earth**, and about one hundred other mainstream titles. There's nothing really wrong with what's included: it's what's not included that makes this book a questionable addition to any ecco reader's library.

Ponti gives a little lip service to genre fare as long as it's mainstream enough for his target audience. **The Creature From The Black Lagoon** and **Revenge Of The Creature** are briefly discussed, for instance, along with Tors' **Around The World Under The Sea** and (of course!) **Flipper**, and Ponti notes Ricou Browning's key work with Tors after climbing out of the Gill Man costume. But very little light is shed on Tors' body of work, which was almost exclusively produced in Florida. I'd rather find out more about **Island Of The Lost** than (choke) **Days Of Thunder** or how a "little over ten minutes" of **Beauty And The Beast** were "made at the Disney/MGM Studios in Orlando." I mean, fuck **Doc Hollywood**; bring on the world's first (and only) born-again/anti-drug and FDA/turkey monster/biker/splatter movie, **Blood Freak**! Bring on **Zaat**! Give me the real pioneers, like William Greffe and Herschell Gordon Lewis. Ponti dispenses with **Deep Throat** and **Two Thousand Maniacs**! with cursory paragraphs, sweeping the state's premiere cinematic roots at Hollywood's furthest fringes to inflate the industry's growing infatuation with Florida's climate and its amusement parks that can double as occasional production space.

Thus, H.G. Lewis' ground-breaking sleaze is swept quietly under the carpet as "one of those sensitive 'feel-good' movies," and the reader is assured that "before **Friday The 13th** and **A Nightmare On Elm Street**, kids used to go see movies like **Hello Down There**" -- bullshit! Ponti is obviously writing for the vast audience of older Floridians who would be distressed to learn the state's real filmmaking heritage, peppered as it is with scoundrels, eccentrics, and opportunists. Ponti's target audience doesn't want to know how cheapjack Italian filmmakers shoot movies they've never heard of in Florida,

how good ol' Herschell Lewis scooped out a girl's brain on the pristine sands of Sarasota Beach or ripped another babe's tongue out in a nearby motel room.

The pisser is that Ponti obviously knows the truth about Florida's cinematic heritage; first among the associates listed in Ponti's acknowledgements is fellow *Tribune* writer Bill Kelley, whose September 8, 1991 article "*It Came From The Swamp*" for the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* revelled in what little of Florida's filmmaking past could be written about in a family newspaper. The existence of Ponti's book will sadly preclude Kelley's marvelous piece being expanded into a proper book any time soon...which really accounts for any malice I may be revealing towards Ponti's harmlessly ineffectual tourist-tome.

For what it is, **Hollywood East** is fine. Ponti is an entertaining writer, and has done his homework within the narrow parameters of his chosen subject. But **Hollywood East** wears its blinders with mock pride. Florida's true heritage as a filmmaker's paradise is a much more engaging tale than the bloodless and fawning parade of Hollywood fare showcased here would allow. It is a tale well worth the telling, and that particular book would be essential. Alas, **Hollywood East** might be a nifty coffee table item for your parents' retirement home if they enjoy the usual late-show cable and video store rental fare...but that's about all it's good for.

Mondo Beyondo

For those who weren't with us back then, the initial issue of *ecco* (January/February '88) initiated a two-part article on "mondo" movies that was later expanded into an ambitious chronology by Michael Weldon in *Psychotronic Video*. Those who read the original *ecco* article as well as the occasional updates throughout the years are aware that I cast a tighter net in defining what constitutes a mondo movie than did Weldon's exhaustive survey. Out were those mondo movies only in name (*Mondo Elvis*), propaganda documentaries (*Triumph Of The Will*), and European horror films that feature the actual killing of animals along with faked human deaths (*Make Them Die Slowly*). Also not included in my original article: a precursor to the mondo movie known as the "goona goona" film, now represented on video and soon to be explored in detail in an upcoming book from Steve Bissette.

Nevertheless, a handful of mondo features new to video have been snagged in the *ecco* net. Among them is this newsletter's namesake, as well as the re-release - with additional scenes - of a previously available mondo sequel.

After the success of 1962's *Mondo Cane*, the word *mondo* (Italian for "world") became shorthand for documentaries focusing on global customs or practices that seem bizarre to western eyes. Many independents rushed out their own imported features to cash in on the mondo craze. Rizzoli films, the distributors of *Mondo Cane*, simply released a patch job entitled *Mondo Pazzo*. Billed as a new feature from the makers of *Mondo Cane*, Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi, the inferior *Mondo Pazzo* (1963) was composed mostly of outtakes from the earlier film. Several years later, *Mondo Pazzo* was recut, rearranged, and renamed by Cinemation head Jerry Gross to fit into a double feature with its superior precursor. Until lately, the only available video release of *Mondo Pazzo*, Vidcrest's *Mondo Cane II*, was the truncated Gross version.

Something Weird Video recently unearthed a 35mm print of the original *Mondo Pazzo*, which includes the footage deleted by Gross. While the restored footage fails to alter my original assessment of the film's merits, *Mondo Pazzo* is best seen in its original running length (94 minutes) and as originally edited

by future mondo-maker Mario Morro. What's obvious from comparing the two versions is that Gross didn't cut any of the film's most sensationalistic scenes. The burning monk, the transvestite cops, and the insect burritos are all here, along with less memorable glimpses of both real and faked extremes in the behavioral customs of various world cultures, including our own. The clumsily staged art "happenings" and other ridiculous bits of invention from the filmmakers remain *Mondo Pazzo*'s most entertaining elements, but it's clearly a second-rate copy of its namesake even in this uncut version.

[*Mondo Pazzo* is available for \$23 postpaid from *Something Weird Video*, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133.]

Jacopetti and Prosperi followed up *Mondo Pazzo* with the brutal 1966 documentary *Africa Addio*, their

**'MONDO PAZZO' STARTS WHERE
'MONDO CANE' LEFT OFF!**

SEE the shocking and hilarious dance of female impersonators in sin-ridden Hamburg

SEE strip-teasers clothed only with wet transparent tissue paper

SEE men fight with sharks!

SEE call girls exposed in their home on wheels!

SEE American policemen, disguised as women, act as bait for sadistic molesters and deviates!

SEE scenes of today's active slave trade!

RECOMMENDED FOR ADULTS ONLY

SEE the hilarious slap concert where music is produced by the vicious slapping of the faces of a male chorus

RIZZOLI FILM DISTRIBUTORS INC. PRESENT

MONDO PAZZO

"BETTER THAN 'MONDO CANE'"
-Los Angeles Times

in TECHNICOLOR • Directed by GUALTIERO JACOPETTI & FRANCO PROSPERI • Produced by MARIO MAFFEI & GIORGIO CECCHINI • Photography by BENITO FRATTAR
Music composed by NINO OLIVIERO • Conducted by BRUNO NICOLAI • Edited by MARIO MORRA
Commentary written by GUALTIERO JACOPETTI.

**HEAR THE THEME
'I'VE SET MY LOVE
TO MUSIC'**
SUNG BY
STEVE ROSSI
ON
RED BIRD RECORDS

undisputed masterpiece (see *ecco* #1). Six years later, they returned with *Farewell Uncle Tom* (Video Search Of Miami), a surrealistic look at slavery in America's antebellum south. What puts this fictitious film in the "mondo" camp is the legend displayed just before the final fadeout: "This film is a documentary. The events depicted and the characters represented are historically true." Using this "logic," those three Amy Fisher made-for-TV movies were documentaries also.

In other words, the whole film is a fraud. Although the filmmakers have based their film on history, *Farewell Uncle Tom* contains no unstaged footage whatsoever. Nevertheless, those expecting *Roots* with linguini are in for a rude shock, for *Farewell Uncle Tom* is a sickening recreation of slavery days that eschews the moral polarities and proselytizing of *Mandingo* and other post-Uncle Tom's Cabin productions for an unsettling descent into man's most bestial and sadistic impulses.

The film's bizarre framing device posits Jacopetti and Prosperi as documentary filmmakers descending upon the South of slavery days. (Their horse-drawn wagon bears the legend "Jacopetti and Prosperi, Traveling Photographers.") Although they interact with the movie's characters, who address the subjective camera lens (as well as the viewer), the filmmakers are heard but never seen. This technique produces a disturbingly voyeuristic effect similar to the "found" atrocity footage of *Cannibal Holocaust*, making the catalog of cruelties in *Farewell Uncle Tom* all the more difficult to watch.

Jacopetti and Prosperi drag out other stunts from their trick bag, including the introduction of actual historical personages such as British author William Makepeace Thackeray, who argued against slavery on financial rather than moral grounds; and the Reverend Falton Stringfellow, a Virginia preacher who justified the selling of humans with scripture. A closing segment set in modern times attempts to bind past and present through having a contemporary black character read from (and fantasize about) William Styron's *The Confessions Of Nat Turner*, the slave who led a bloody rebellion against



plantation owners in 1831. Tellingly, the camera shifts to Turner's point of view.

Unlike Jacopetti and Prosperi's previous films, *Farewell Uncle Tom* is nearly devoid of humor, sarcastic or otherwise. To their credit, the filmmakers laugh at their own intentions during an interview with a dandified, bespectacled slave who philosophically attempts to defend his own loss of freedom. "Of all the thousands of tormented slaves in this country, we have to run into that puppet!" sputters Jacopetti angrily.

Filed in Haiti and the U.S. by a team led by Claudio Cirillo, Antonio Climati, and Benito Frattari, the X-rated *Farewell Uncle Tom*, a relatively lavish exploitation film, received only a brief run in the grindhouses of Times Square and

other urban neighborhood theaters. The dupey, English-language video we watched was copied from an Australian release that is no longer available. But those who can sit through this stomach-turning historical fantasy will probably concur that *Farewell Uncle Tom* isn't likely to soon be reissued.

AN INCREDIBLE ORGY OF SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

ECCO says
SEE The secret,
illegal dueling clubs of Berlin!



ECCO says
LOOK At the
precise violence of Karate,
the art of the empty hand!



ECCO says
OBSERVE The Beauty of
the monasteries of Greece as man
climbs into the sky to find God!



ECCO says
WITNESS The Horror of
the last performance of the
Grand Guignol!



ECCO says
BEHOLD Evon Evah
pierce his throat with swords!



If this film frightens you, it's because the world is frightening!
If you find it horrifying, it's because the world is filled with horror!
If it shocks you it's because we are a shocking race!
If you find it filled with beauty and hope, you have understood it!

We dare You to SEE...



Narrated by **GEORGE SANDERS** in **TECHNICOLOR ROMA** and **WIDE SCREEN**
A CRESA-ROMA RELEASE Music by RIZ ORTOLANI of Mondo Cane Fame

[*Farewell Uncle Tom* can be had for \$27.90 postpaid from Video Search Of Miami, P.O. Box 16-1917, Miami, FL 33116-1917.]

The big news for mondo fans is the Something Weird Video release of the 1963 feature *Ecco*, finally appearing on home video (and letterboxed!) after years of having been believed lost. Often discussed but rarely screened since its quadruple-bill drive-in playdates during the seventies, the impressively filmed and edited *Ecco* confirms its reputation as one of the genre's most expressive achievements.

Originally two separate films, both technicolor sequels to the popular Italian export (and proto-mondo movie) *World At Night*, *Ecco* was recut and given new footage and an English-language commentary by Olympic International's R.L. Frost and Bob Cresse, the makers of *House On Bare Mountain*. Preview screenings attracted the attention of American International Pictures, who licensed the film from "Cresa Roma Films, Inc." (aka Olympic International) for a 1965 re-release.

For a mondo feature, *Ecco* excels in its use of cinematic techniques to heighten the emotional impact of its powerful images. The late George Sanders provides narration, his elegant baritone and world-weary delivery perfectly complementing Cresse's cruelly cynical commentary. As in the original *Mondo Cane*, the

ironic juxtaposition of disparate cultural actions (and reactions) is used to elicit sardonic comparisons from the narrator. An African tribal dance performed for tourists is contrasted with the modern version demonstrated by the same teenage dancers at a nightclub later that evening. An opulent debutante's ball is compared to a coinciding street ball held by drunken beggars. Women undergoing artificial insemination share the screen with those who climb a steep stairway on their raw, bloody knees in a campaign to God for the blessing of being granted children.

Other highlights include the body piercing of Frenchman Evon Evah and the final gory performance of the Grand Guignol. Even a few of the film's obviously staged scenes, such as a surreptitiously filmed - or so we are told - black mass in "London" (in all likelihood shot by Frost in the U.S.) and a strangely poetic look at young Swedish toughs, are so striking in their use of film to convey emotional undercurrents that they deserve inclusion anyway.

Alternately attracting and then repulsing, Ecco both demands and elicits viewer response through director Gianni Proia's sobering parade of images and the icy detachment of Cresce and original author Francesco Mazzei's commentary. Though still firmly rooted in the "mondo" camp, Ecco consistently aims higher than the average pseudo-documentary. As skillful and imaginative exploitation, it is without peer.

Not so **Mondo Balordo** (Something Weird Video), a 1965 Italian feature released two years later in the U.S. by filmmaker Albert T. Viola (**Preacherman**) for Crown International Pictures. **Mondo Balordo**'s claim to fame is its narration, spoken in the warm, theatrical voice of Boris Karloff. Unfortunately, the involvement of Karloff cannot salvage a poorly-assembled collage of ugly, haphazardly filmed segments that appear to be rejects from earlier mondo features. With little to offer of its own, **Mondo Balordo** suffers by comparison to similar films made years earlier.

Co-hosted by France Drago, a midget rock and roll singer and impersonator who mimics to a Louis Prima record, **Balordo** shuffles outlandish phony segments with "safari" type footage and the usual mondo outrages. But **Mondo Balordo** drowns its best moments under repetitive footage of events familiar to viewers of television documentaries, let alone earlier mondo movies. The German dueling society from Ecco is revisited, as is the notion of comparing native to modern dances. These and other segments simply look tired, the victim of audience indifference.

Those who hunger to see Arab women dye their hair blonde with camel piss may find **Mondo Balordo** of interest, but mondo fans will experience a sensation of déjà vu made worse by the inevitable revelation that it was better the first time. "It's really a crazy world," says Karloff, but the claim would be more genuine were **Mondo Balordo** less predictable.

An unsatisfying sameness also inflicts **Mondo Violence** (T-Z Video), a late-seventies Italian mondo feature from **Mondo Cane** cameraman Antonio Climati and Mario Morra, makers of the reprehensible **Savage Man**, **Savage Beast**. Retitled **Mondo Violence** for video, this film may be the rarely screened **This Violent World**, or **Addio Ultimo Uomo**, or even **Mondo Cane 2000**. It matters little, for rarely has such shockingly unspectacular footage been so carelessly edited together and released as a feature film.

Documentary footage of animal deaths (common to **The Discovery Channel**) and Indian fakirs lacerating their own flesh is clumsily mixed with staged footage of Amazonian slave markets, Manhattan city employees wrestling full-grown alligators from the sewer, and a bogus Aussie survivalist group who've dubbed themselves the "School for White Aborigines." These latter scenes seem endless, whereas the documentary sequences are but brief clips save the ubiquitous animal footage.

As with Climati and Morra's other mondo features, such as **Sweet and Savage** (1981), **Mondo Violence** will sicken many viewers not only with its graphic depictions of bloodshed and misery but by its shallow and amoral presentation of such ghoulish footage as entertainment. Not content to gawk at the suffering of the diseased and starving, Climati and Morra also take delight in offering up primitive customs for the derision of middle-class Europeans. Such cinematic mud-slinging was balanced in earlier mondos by contrasting the rituals of the primitive with the routines of their counterparts in the so-called "civilized" western world. Not so in **Mondo Violence**, where we are encouraged to feel superior to all we witness.

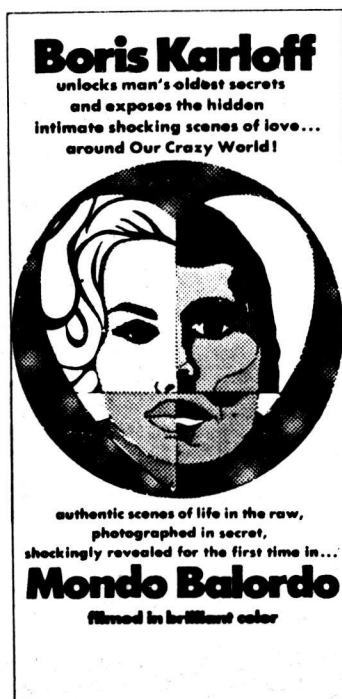
Ultimately, **Mondo Violence** will even disappoint the audience for **Faces Of Death** and other "shockumentaries." Segments such as that of a fakir casually slicing off a sizeable chunk of his own tongue, a scene you'll hope was staged, cannot compensate for the film's inert bulk. This inferior mondo compilation, already wrecked by the indifference of editor Morra, is further compromised by T-Z Video's sloppy film-to-tape transfer. T-Z wunderkinds somehow reversed the reel order, so that "Fin" appears a little over halfway through the film. At this point, masochistic viewers have yet another reel to endure before **Mondo Violence** abruptly turns to blank tape.

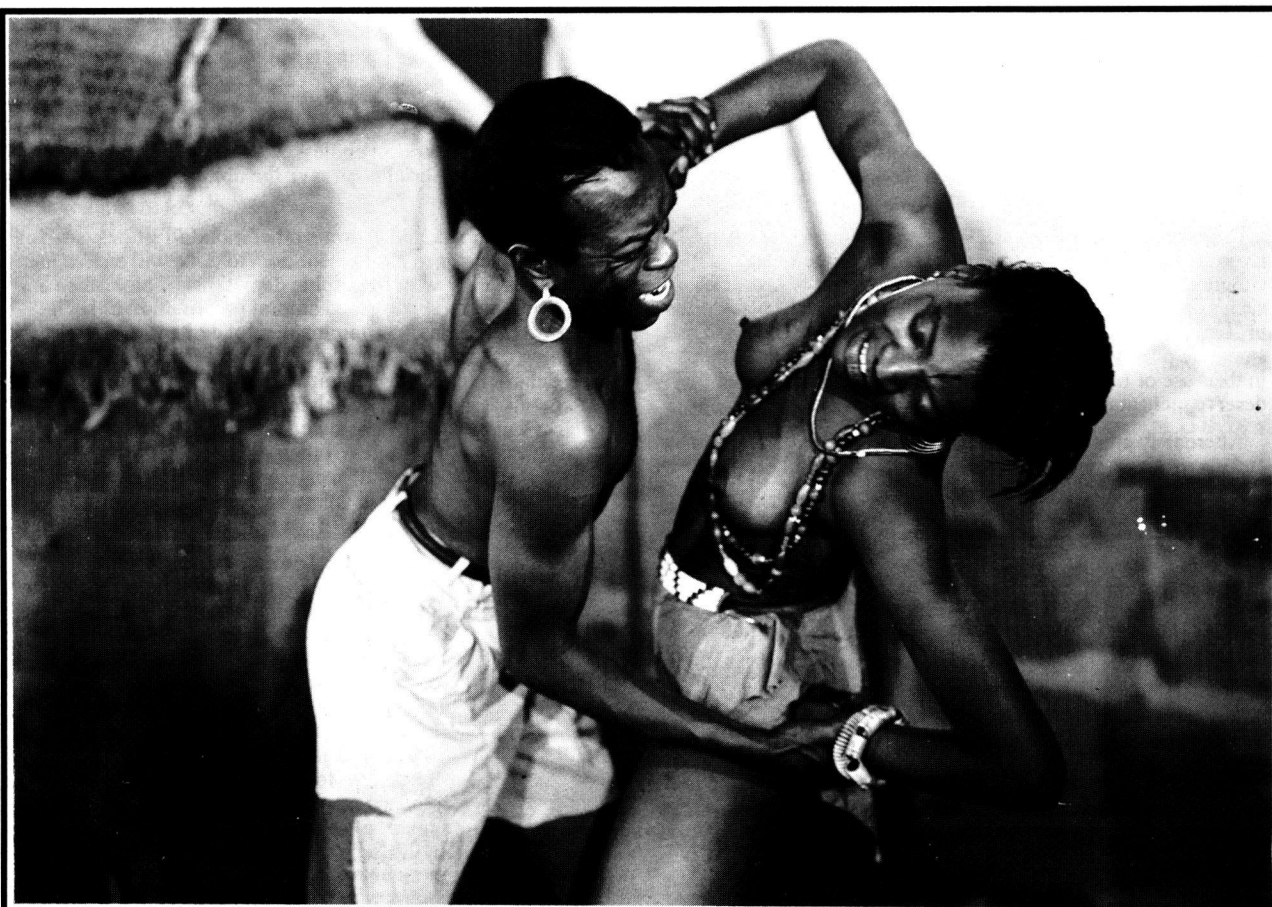
Whereas **Mondo Violence** is a lackluster reminder of the state of the mondo movie in the seventies, the 1992 compilation **Death Scenes 2** (Wavelength Video) is a horrifying example of where the genre, post-**Faces Of Death**, has led. Only those with a coroner's jaundiced eye will be able to stomach its visions of death without feeling queasy.

A sequel to the infamous taped collection of coroners' photographs of murder victims and suicides, **Death Scenes 2** raises the stakes of its predecessor by including rare footage of the dead and dying, from celebrities to everyday unfortunates. Some of these reels are indeed rare in uncut form. The death of Vic Morrow and two child actors is shown from four different angles (and frame-by-frame). Film clips from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam go further in depicting the horrors of war than those usually seen by the general public.

Grotesque and hard to watch, these clips nevertheless pale beside the stills rounded up for this compilation. Coroner's office photography of Manson family victims and the corpses of murdered Hollywood celebrities reveal the true ugliness of violent death. Others deglamorize beloved Hollywood legends by displaying their withered remains on the mortician's table. Frequent jumps from stills to documentary footage to clips from forgotten feature films, so arranged as to offer visual support to the narrative's claims, recall similar segments from **Mondo Cane** as well as attest to the skill of editor Gordon Pepper and his team.

Death Scenes 2 falters most when it relies on familiar material, such as the inclusion of a long segment from the "driver safety" film **Signal 30**, which is available on video in its





ABOVE: A fake Mau Mau grapples with a fake villager in one of the Hollywood-filmed segments of the 1954 documentary **Mau Mau**.

entirety from another source (see ecco #17). Though explicit, the Bud Dwyer suicide footage is grainer than usually seen in underground tapes. Also, whereas the previous tape was narrated by an on-camera Anton LaVey, an unseen narrator listed in the credits as Harold Wells reads Nick Bougas' "Police Gazette" style copy to similar effect. Combined with an appropriately clammy musical score, this overripe narration serves up a revolting collection of photos that celebrate death and decay with a carnival showman's zeal.

While on the subject of showmen, the live performance of the **Jim Rose Circus Sideshow** taped at the Moore Theater in Seattle (American Visuals) isn't so much a mondo movie as it is a depiction of vintage sideshow routines recreated with a sheen of contemporary cynicism. Unlike mondo, only several jokes from Rose himself are faked. Thus, the Amazing Mr. Lifo actually suspends kitchen appliances from his nipples and penis, the Torture King pierces his own flesh with dozens of steel rods, and "The Enigma" chews up handfuls of live insects.

These acts plus more are presented in stomach-churning detail by directors Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, the team behind MTV's defunct **The Cutting Edge**, who linger lovingly over every pierced nipple and

stretched appendage. Having witnessed a live performance by the Rose troupe, I can honestly state that Dayton and Faris' tape, with its unflinching close-ups, is as likely to induce weak knees as is seeing the sideshow in person. Thus, I salute those brave souls who daringly guzzle Matt "The Tube" Crowley's "bile beer." Better them than me.



Mau Mau director Elwood Price.

Several current releases barely warrant inclusion in an article about mondo movies. The video release of **Mau Mau** (Something Weird Video), a sensationalized 1954 documentary about the revolt of the radical faction of Africa's Kikuyu tribe under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta, has provided mondo fans with a noteworthy precursor to Jacopetti and Prosperi's **Africa Addio**. Twelve years before the latter film, the informative yet hard-hitting **Mau Mau** featured actual footage of the gruesome results of Africa's social and political revolution.

But what gains **Mau Mau** inclusion in a discussion of mondo movies are the five minutes or so of faked Mau Mau attacks that the distributor inserted to justify a sensationalistic, mondo-style campaign. Virtually all of **Mau Mau**'s stills, as well as most of the "coming attractions" reel, were

taken from this bogus footage, which resembles exploitation's time-honored "square up" reels in both content and intent.

The authentic **Mau Mau** footage, filmed on location in Kenya by cameraman Charles Trotter, was directed by Elwood G. Price, a Rambler dealer and occasional big-game hunter from San Bernardino. To help lend his project respectability, Price somehow managed to snare newsman Chet Huntley, who solemnly narrates writer Dave Sheppard's informative commentary. Although director Price himself once inferred in an interview that the Soviet Union was behind the Mau Mau rebellion, later referring to Kikuyu tribesmen who agreed to take an anti-Mau Mau oath devised by the British Government as being "of base intelligence," **Mau Mau**'s narrative avoids the anti-African bias that one might expect.

But **Mau Mau**'s appeal was too erudite for American audiences who preferred their news on television, their trashy entertainment onscreen. Price took **Mau Mau** to exploitation legend Dan Sonney, who agreed to distribute it. Noting that the promotional possibilities were limited by its scholarly tone, Sonney took **Mau Mau** to movie title maker Ray Mercer for some doctoring. After constructing several makeshift thatched huts in a Los Angeles lot, Mercer hired about a dozen local acting hopefuls, gave the women only loincloths to wear, and then filmed inept scenes depicting Mau Mau warriors attacking a village whose men have all left on a hunt. Against a background of flaming thatch, Mercer's actors enact scenes of murder and ravishment, their faces contorted in mimicry of hatred or fear.

Sonney got his ad campaign, Price got his check, and moviegoers got an uneasy blend of straightforward documentary and lurid fakery. Not

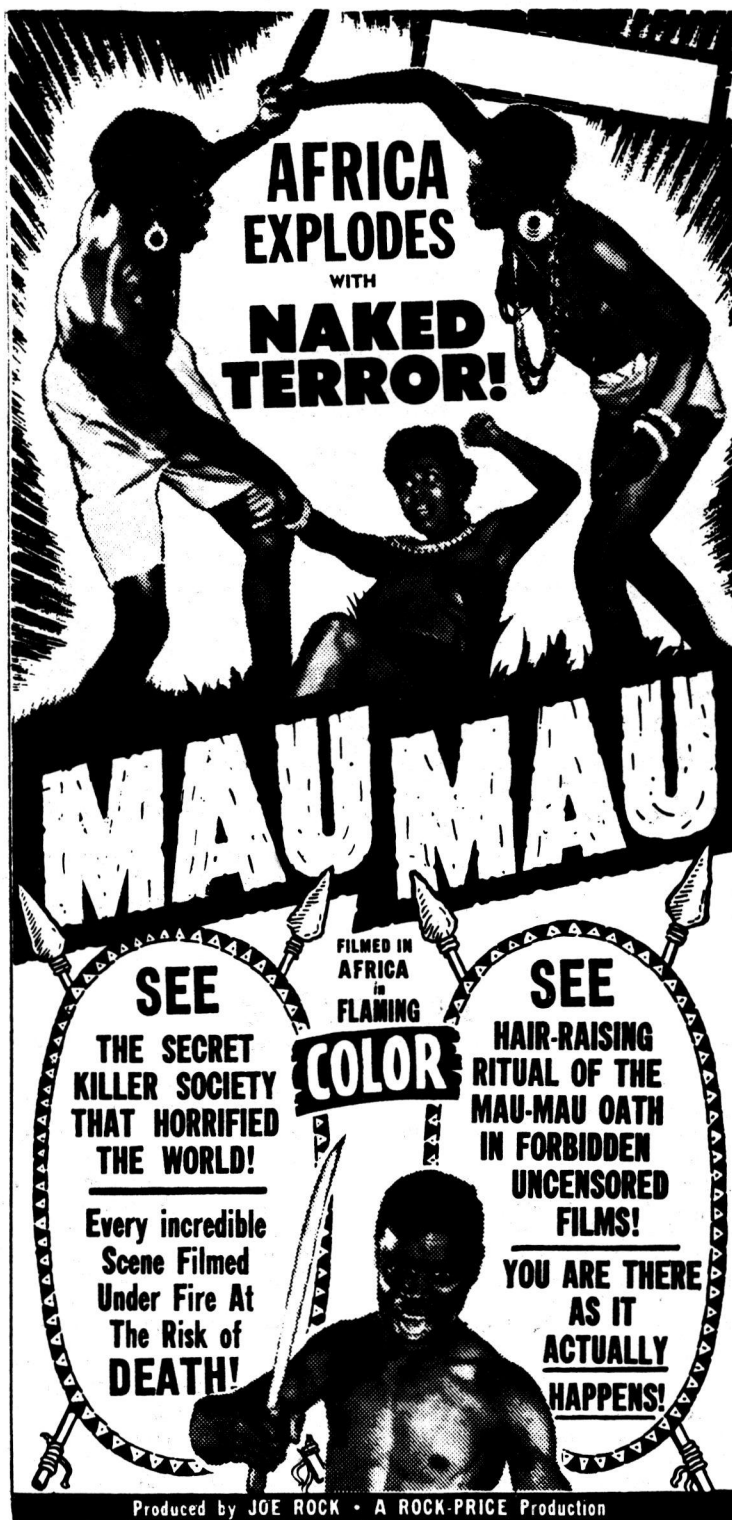
surprisingly, **Mau Mau** enjoyed a successful run, particularly in black-owned theaters and in venues where near-naked sisters from Los Angeles offered sufficient reason to buy a ticket. Urban thrill-hounds were lured by the elaborate - if tasteless - campaigns given **Mau Mau** in several of its major showings. Although critics panned the film for its fakery, they were respectful of Price's documentary footage and Sheppard's non-judgmental narrative.

Barely an hour long, **Mau Mau** is supplemented in its video release by a collection of jungle-themed trailers, including **Jungle Flight** with Ann Savage from **Detour**, Ronald Reagan in **Tropic Zone**, **Mogambo**, and others. Though mildly entertaining, these trailers pale next to **Mau Mau**, a fascinating relic from the days when any topic could be sold to apathetic Americans simply by adding knives and naked women.

[**Mau Mau** is available for \$23 postpaid from *Something Weird Video*, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133.]

The 1981 import **Succubare** (or **Incredibly Fantastic...Succubare**, according to the opening title) is an Asian supernatural thriller with mondo sensibilities. Whenever the story begins to drag, the filmmakers cut to one of several Chinese geeks, who face the camera while munching heartily on live lizards, toads, mice, and other items not found in *Dean and Deluca*.

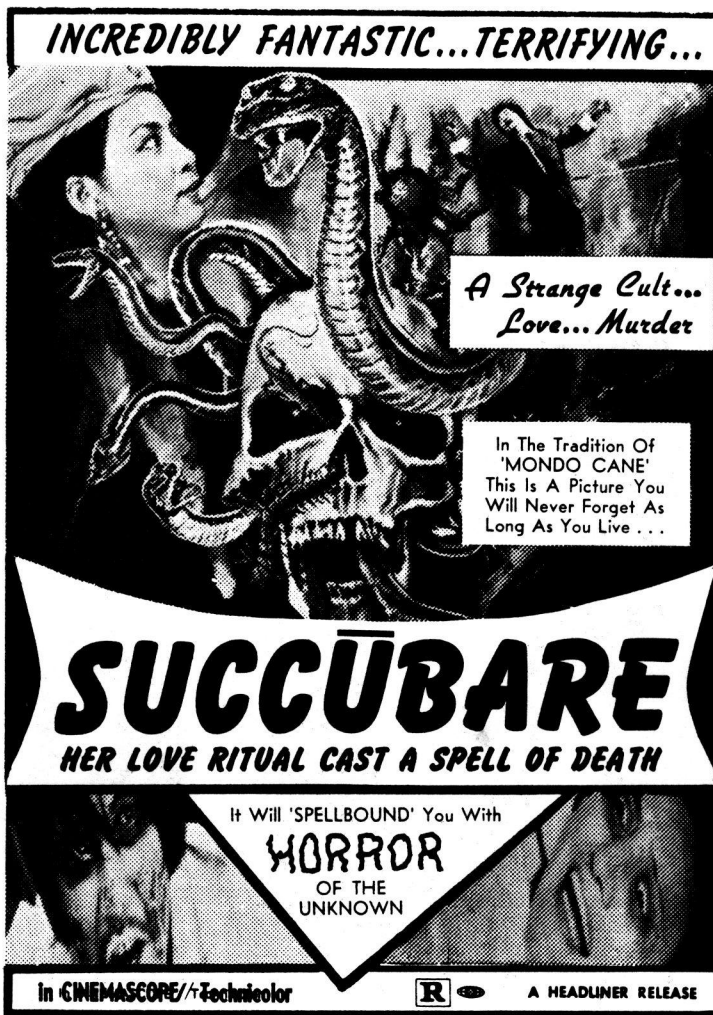
Derivative of and inferior to a number of similar films, **Succubare** is of the worm-spewing, snake- and insect-infested digestive system variety of Asian gross-out. Distributed by Headliner Productions, the company behind Ed Wood's **The Sinister Urge**, **Succubare** lacks polish and subtlety yet refrains from being as nauseating an experience as *Devil* (see



ecco #2) or Centipede Horror. In other words, it's destined to please nobody.

Well, maybe there is an audience for a colorful, offbeat fairy tale about four princesses, confined by magic to a mountain retreat, who punish deserting lovers by poisoning them with noxious potions. Their strange brew results in a lot of fishing bait writhing about all over desperate actors, but nothing ever happens to justify Headliner's claim that **Succubare** is "a picture you will never forget as long as you live." Having watched it for a second time several days ago, I still had to check my notes to write these comments.

Now I remember...**Succubare** could be used as a textbook example on how not to edit a movie. Dialogue is lopped off mid-sentence, and certain sequences are seemingly strung together randomly as though Tristan Tzara were dictating from the grave. Footage of reptiles - apparently included to inspire a reaction of "ick" - is edited in whenever the filmmakers introduce supernatural elements, a clumsy clue-in that would weaken the elements of suspense...if there were any.



Strictly for mondo completists, God help 'em, **Succubare** invites slumber in spite of its shock value. Not good enough to be appreciated by fans nor lurid enough for the merely jaded, **Succubare** is destined for third billing in drive-in purgatory.

Nowadays, the mondo sensibility may be detected on both network and cable television. The prime time series **I Witness Video** invites viewers to gawk at both natural and man-made disasters, occasionally offering a peek at a fatality. The exploitive news digest **Hard Copy** has adapted the mondo film's catty, irreverent tone for its reporting style. Last year, cable television's **The Discovery Channel** aired **Beyond Bizarre**, a look at unexplained phenomena that contrasted the natural mummification of corpses in Mexico with the techniques used by a small band of modern-day devotees. Though reminiscent of Thierry Zeno's **Of The Dead**, the PBS three-part special **Death, The Trip Of A Lifetime** failed to match the depth of the former film despite frequently fascinating footage of imaginatively designed coffins in Ghana and an Australian funeral home with an all-female staff. Now

the domain of television, the mondo movie has been overshadowed by the detritus of a society whose demand for rapid information precludes self-reflection.

Afro-SINtric

No doubt ecco readers are familiar with Afrocentrism, a theory from some African-American scholars that challenges the widely-held notion that Anglo-Saxon Europe was the cradle of modern civilization. In the view of Afrocentrists, the artistically and scientifically advanced culture of ancient Egypt was created by Africans. As reported in Washington's City Paper, a lecture by author Ralph Wiley (**What Black People Should Do Now**), former sports journalist and proponent of Afrocentrism, included the remark that upon seeing the Great Sphinx in Egypt, Wiley was struck by its "big nose" and "big lips," concluding that it "looked like Oprah." Ms. Winfrey was unavailable to comment on the comparison.

While we here at ecco haven't a clue as to where modern culture originated but would love to know who to blame for **Full House** or **Melrose Place**, we trust that the scholars who advocate Afrocentric study have drawn their conclusions from unbiased research. However, it is a little known fact that one of the first white purveyors of Afrocentrism was a Jewish businessman named...Harry C. Novak!

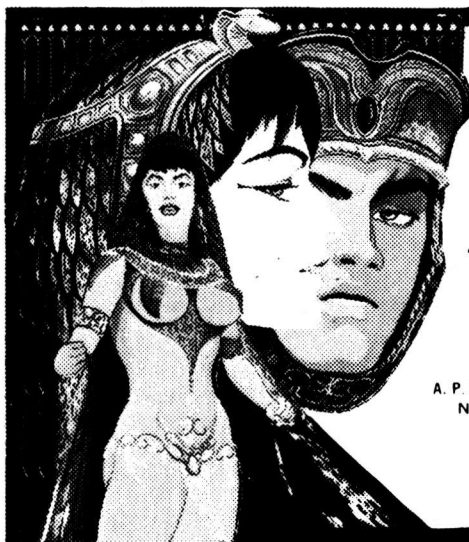
In 1970, Novak's Boxoffice International financed **The Notorious Cleopatra**, a lavish historical nudie about the sexual misadventures of the Queen of the Nile. Directed by nudie whiz Peter Perry (under the ridiculous moniker A.P. Stootsberry), **The Notorious Cleopatra** featured a black starlet in the title role. Identified in the film's credits simply as Sonora, she and several African-American actors represent the few citizens of Egypt encountered in this 88 minute ode to jealousy and seduction. (Not surprisingly, the majority of the film is set in all-white Rome.) Even Cleopatra's handmaiden is a blonde in this hedged bet from Novak and Perry.

According to the Boxoffice International version of history, Cleopatra is visited by Mark Antony (Johnny Rocco), who is on an official mission to win the Egyptian queen for Julius Caesar. Antony, however, takes Cleopatra for himself before returning to Rome. Disguised, Cleopatra and her handmaiden Charmian (Dixie Donovan) journey to Rome to destroy Caesar, thus clearing the way for Antony's reign. They fail, but Caesar is murdered by his advisors and Antony is made the scapegoat.

Antony flees to Egypt, but is unable to lead their fleet to victory against the Romans. As in more conventional tellings, the famous lovers meet a tragic end.

And so should this movie. Despite a frequently witty script from Jim Macher and impressive production values, *The Notorious Cleopatra* is a

tedious attempt from Perry to match the success of his previous historical crotch opera, *The Secret Sex Lives Of Romeo And Juliet*. Sonora is neither talented nor attractive enough to convincingly portray the legendary seductress of statesmen, but her scenes are no worse than the awkwardly staged orgy



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sequences that pad out the film's running time. Obese actor Jay Edwards is hilarious as a gluttonous Caesar who favors food over sex, yet I suspect that the opportunity to see clumps of half-chewed food fall from the engorged mouth of a fat man isn't a leading factor in the selection of one softcore porn video over another.

[Historical smut junkies will want to know that *The Notorious Cleopatra* is available for \$23 postpaid from *Something Weird Video*, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133.]

Saturn Cinema

In 1974, at the tail end of the so-called "blaxploitation" craze, filmmakers Jim Newman and John Coney attempted to capture the essence of eccentric jazz musician Sun Ra, who, with his Intergalactic Arkestra, had been responsible for redefining the boundaries of modern jazz. To tell the story of Sun Ra, Newman and Coney eschewed the usual "on-stage" approach and instead cast Ra and his Arkestra in a science fiction parable about a group of musicians from the planet Saturn who land their spaceship on Earth to save the black race from destruction. Though it sounds bizarre, the concept was suggested by Sun Ra (real name: Sonny Blount) himself, who insisted that he actually was from Saturn. After seeing *Space Is The Place* (Rhapsody Films Video), Newman and Coney's bizarre portrait of his complex self-mythology, some viewers may not doubt Ra's claim.

Space Is The Place opens with Ra in an interplanetary garden, discussing with his Arkestra the necessity of delivering Earth's black race to another planet where they will be free of white influence. This intergalactic Marcus Garvey begins to outline his goal by stating that "the first thing to do is to consider time as officially ended." Ra and the Arkestra then land their spaceship on Earth, where he attempts to convince ghetto youths of the importance of joining him and the Arkestra in outer space. Their means of teleportation will be music. Meanwhile, Ra's external spiritual self becomes engaged in a game of poker with an evil, pimp-like demon. The stakes are the future of black civilization.

Intertwined throughout this spacey scenario are clips of Ra and his Arkestra performing their precedent-smashing music, which has been dubbed "Afro-psychedelica." Their polyrhythmic sounds propel *Space Is The Place*, an unusual



ABOVE: Two views of avant-garde jazz musician Sun Ra from the sci-fi curio *Space Is The Place* (1974).

portrait of a most uncommon musician. Newman, Coney, and screenwriter Joshua Smith have provided Ra with the perfect vehicle for his uncompromising message, borrowing elements from other works and somehow fitting them into their crazy-quilt of a movie. In the film's prologue, Ra converses with a robed, mirror-faced being who will be instantly recognizable to fans of Maya Deren's *Meshe's Of The Afternoon*. Likewise, the poker game Ra plays to save the black race is reminiscent of the chess match with a personified Death in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*.

But the most telling scene in *Space Is The Place* is a flashback to a 1943 Chicago nightclub, in which "Sunny Ray" tortures the bourgeois audience with discordant piano chords, ultimately causing a whirlwind of destruction that chases the terrified patrons from the club. Sun Ra died last year, but *Space Is The Place* - along with his many recorded works - will go far in preserving the memory of this giant of experimental music.

Roman Knows

by Harold Clarke

In most movies, homicidal maniacs or violent schizophrenics are presented as little more than objects of fear and revulsion, one-dimensional caricatures who primarily exist to propel the narrative flow by committing pivotal acts of terror or perversion. Consequently, viewers receive little insight that would allow them to observe events as perceived by the malefactors.

One filmmaker who has offered a different perspective is Roman Polanski. Much of his oeuvre explores humanity's dark side. In so doing, he presents the causes driving the frequently misanthropic conduct of his characters in such a manner that invites sympathy, if not empathy, for the afflicted. In two of his most memorable and frightening films, *Repulsion* and *The Tenant*, Polanski displays the horrors perpetrated and experienced by his subjects and examines the influences that drove them to such extremes.

In the 1965 film *Repulsion* (Off Hollywood Video), Catherine Deneuve portrays Carol, a young Belgian woman working as a manicurist in a London boutique and sharing an apartment with her older sister Helen (Yvonne Furneaux). From the outset, Carol is presented as delicate and disturbed, teetering on the verge of mental collapse. Eventually, this instability is revealed to be a byproduct of sexual abhorrence. Anything remotely suggesting carnality not only disgusts her but intensifies her mental detachment.

Carol's deterioration is further exacerbated by the hostile surroundings she inhabits. Her days are spent servicing repugnant clients in the beauty salon, fending off vulgar sexual propositions from construction workers, and resisting the overtures of Colin (John Fraser), her lovelorn suitor. Her nights, in turn, are spent quarrelling with her sister, contending with Michael (Ian Hendry), Helen's

married lover, and attempting to tune out the sounds of their lovemaking.

After Helen and Michael depart for a vacation in Italy, Carol's condition rapidly deteriorates. Left alone in the dwelling, she experiences a series of progressively horrifying hallucinations: the apartment walls crack open with jarring intensity, a man with shadowy features sporadically appears in her bedroom and rapes her, and a cluster of male hands spring

from the wall to grab and fondle her as she stumbles down a hallway. The horror generated by these delusions culminates disastrously when Carol commits two murders. Afterwards, she is reduced to a catatonic state, unable to respond to or perceive the world about her.

Repulsion stands out from similar movies primarily because of Polanski's masterful craftsmanship. His editing and framing techniques, along with the sound effects and camera angles that he employs, present the film from Carol's point of view. Her surroundings abound with numerous sights and sounds - the rotting remains of a skinned rabbit, buzzing flies, a telephone that rings with no one on the line, a razor in a glass, a clock ticking, water dripping - that assume bizarre and menacing dimensions under Polanski's direction. The sinister atmosphere created by these elements are further entrenched by Polanski's depiction of those who populate Carol's small world. In this, Polanski captures



everyday humanity's most hideous physical characteristics. Faces appear distorted or wrinkled, body parts twisted or misshapen, and eyes leering or threatening. By portraying Carol's world as grotesque and obscene, Polanski demonstrates how she ultimately breaks down and capitulates to irresistible homicidal impulses.

With his long-time collaborator Gerard Brach, Polanski wrote the screenplay for **Repulsion** in 17 days. Pressures applied on him from studio executives led to a frantic and turbulent production schedule (so much so that, despite the film's stunning technique, Polanski later described it as the most technically inept movie he had ever made). Despite these impediments, Polanski managed to construct a film that some have likened to the Bunuel/Dali masterpiece **Un Chien Andalou**. The comparison applies: both cast a disorienting and disturbing spell as they explore madness with a surrealistic spin. **Repulsion** also benefits in its use of a dissonant and discordant jazz soundtrack from Chico Hamilton that underscores Carol's torment.

Catherine Deneuve's devastating portrayal of Carol further enhances **Repulsion's** twisted appeal. Polanski selected Deneuve for the role because, as he later stated, she resembled "an angelic-looking girl with a slightly soiled halo." Accordingly, her natural beauty contrasts sharply with the sexual turmoil that engulfs Carol's soul. Deneuve communicates this dichotomy in a near-silent performance, using numerous gestures and reactions to express her fear and disgust in such a manner that the spoken word could not match. As a result, when Carol wreaks her sexually motivated revenge, she elicits support and sympathy rather than condemnation for expelling the demons that mercilessly afflict her.

Polanski further examines another social outsider's breakdown in the 1976 feature **The Tenant** (Paramount Home Video). Here, Polanski explores the factors that cause Trelkovsky, a Polish office clerk working in Paris, to evolve from a polite and deferential young man to a deeply disturbed and self-destructive madman. Though it is not a flawless production, **The Tenant** successfully demonstrates how the vagaries of a pernicious and sadistic

society can drive a seemingly normal person into ruinous insanity.

The Tenant opens with Trelkovsky (played by Polanski himself) attempting to obtain lodging in a Parisian apartment building. After enduring a scornful concierge (Shelley Winters) and an oddly inquisitorial landlord (Melvyn Douglas), Trelkovsky is finally given a room that had been previously occupied by a woman who attempted suicide by jumping from the window. The woman, Simone (Dominique Poulange), is now lying close to death in a local hospital. Trelkovsky's inquisitiveness over Simone compels him to visit her at her bedside. There he encounters Stella (Isabelle Adjani), an old friend of Simone's. As Trelkovsky and Stella discuss her situation, Simone, who is bandaged from head to foot, unleashes a bloodcurdling shriek and dies. The ghastly incident only increases Trelkovsky's curiosity regarding Simone.

Soon, however, Trelkovsky notices that his already unpleasant neighbors have grown even more hostile. They allege that his noises in the night keep them awake, and the landlord threatens to "take steps" to rectify the problem. Meanwhile, the proprietor of a neighborhood cafe continually serves him hot chocolate and a buttered roll, Simone's favorites, even though he prefers (and orders) coffee and a pastry.

As the film progresses, Trelkovsky's indulgence of his neighbors' eccentric behavior turns into a fear that they want him dead. This paranoia is further heightened when he becomes certain that a peeping tom is watching him from another apartment building. To combat these morbid obsessions, he begins to wear Simone's clothes with a woman's wig and make-up. Eventually, he finds that he can trust no one - including Stella. After embarking on a rampage in which he destroys both her flat and his own apartment, he dresses in full drag and commits an act of violence with consequences eerily similar to those suffered by Simone.

Like **Repulsion**, the screenplay for **The Tenant**, which is based on a Roland Topor novel entitled **Le Locataire Chimérique**, was penned by Polanski and Brach. Unlike **Repulsion**, however, **The Tenant** is impaired by an abrupt shift in character. This sudden change, which occurs midway through the film, comes across as being not entirely plausible.

The first half of **The Tenant** depicts Trelkovsky attempting to ingratiate himself with his neighbors, co-workers, acquaintances, etc. For the most part, it conveys a light, almost humorous mood as he encounters a multitude of odd characters who cast a strange,



ABOVE: Fearing for his life, Trelkovsky (Roman Polanski) peers from his apartment window in the 1976 thriller **The Tenant**.

if not unsettling, aura. This portion of the film is nearly Capraesque as it sets up a foundation for the rest of the story. Trelovsky could have been portrayed by Jimmy Stewart as a young man from a small town, earnestly trying to find his way in a bewildering metropolis.

The second half of **The Tenant**, however, which focuses on Trelovsky's breakdown, clashes with the previously established tone. Few clues are offered in the first half to indicate that Trelovsky is capable of suffering such a complete and ferocious transformation. The peccadillos he displays early in the film, such as a reluctance to tell Stella he needs to use the restroom, are presented as mild idiosyncracies. Consequently, the violent nature that consumes him as a result of his mental collapse at the conclusion conflicts with the image forged in the first hour of the film.

This inconsistency notwithstanding, **The Tenant** still satisfies as a frightening portrayal of madness. Like **Repulsion**, Polanski's directorial skills endow **The Tenant** with a palpable air of fear and foreboding. Polanski and his cameraman, Ingmar Bergman alumnus Sven Nykvist, excel in framing the grotesques who invade Trelovsky's life with hideous angles and positions. During the film's second half, Polanski and Nykvist convert Trelovsky's apartment into a chamber of horrors, replete with frightening shadows and images. In this context, the sinister elements skillfully inserted by Polanski, combined with **The Tenant**'s theme of insanity stemming from humanity's savagery, significantly lessen the importance of the story's narrative shortcomings.

Although **Repulsion** and **The Tenant** are primarily renowned as psychological shockers, what prevails after careful scrutiny is how characters usually portrayed as monsters are given affectionate, if not tender, treatment. This perspective particularly amazes because both productions emphasize horror, violence, and cruelty in a style reminiscent of the Grand Guignol. Nevertheless, amidst the chaos and carnage, Polanski clearly demonstrates in each film how fragile personalities striving to survive as outsiders in alien worlds attempt to resist but ultimately succumb to the evil that surrounds them.

This theme is especially apparent in how Polanski presents the stark terror both Carol and Trelovsky experience because of their inability to discern reality from fantasy. For both characters, this vulnerability is in part related to sexual

confusion. Carol, a beautiful and nubile blonde, arouses men with her appearance and apparent acquiescence. This passivity, however, masks the torment that plagues her. Consequently, when the male predators act on their urges, she initially demurs but later responds with a murderous fury. Carol's sexual uncertainty, however, materializes in her reactions to Michael. Early in the film, she vomits at the sight of his undershirt. Later, at the height of her breakdown, she happily irons the same garment (appliance unplugged) that had previously elicited such disgust. Here Polanski demonstrates that Carol longs for domestic bliss, but is deprived of her desires by avaricious men who only want her to satisfy their own libidinal cravings.

Trelovsky's sexual anguish is presented in more ambiguous terms. His attempts to assert himself and establish his masculinity throughout the first half of **The Tenant** fail. This, combined with a fear and paranoia of the other residents in the building and his obsession with Simone, lead to a retreat into femininity as a way of compensating for his shortcomings. As Polanski demonstrates, the pressure to fulfill a virile image along with the shame Trelovsky feels over his ineffectual manhood (an unwelcome tenant of his own body) can backfire with deadly consequences. More significantly, through Carol and Trelovsky, Polanski condemns a society which allows and even encourages exploitation and victimization.

It is this culture that ultimately shoulders the blame for Carol and Trelovsky's affliction. Polanski, who as a boy lost family members in the Holocaust and was forced into a nomadic existence to survive, pulls no punches in clearly and repeatedly demonstrating the culpability of his audience. He also castigates the insensitivity of those who should care about Carol and Trelovsky, citing the blindness of those individuals - such as Colin and Helen for Carol and Stella for Trelovsky - who should be aware of their condition and thus are at least partially responsible for its manifestation.

His overriding contempt, however, is reserved for those who only care about themselves and behave accordingly. Consequently, Polanski uses the hallucinations, distorted images, and frightening apparitions that Carol and Trelovsky view to indicate that they perceive the world as it really exists: a malignant cauldron of xenophobia and hatred.

Rue, The Days When...

by Erich Mees

John Patrick Hayes' 1963 black and white feature **The Rotten Apple** (aka **Five Minutes To Love**) will probably be remembered, if at all, for the novelty value of an early performance by **The Golden Girls/Golden Palace**'s Rue McClanahan. This is unfortunate, because **The Rotten Apple** itself is a nihilistic sleaze classic just waiting to be rediscovered by a new generation of "B" movie fans.

Although the print from Something Weird Video is missing the writing and technical credits, the movie's curious pacing suggests that it was adapted from a stage play. Every scene is clearly a SCENE, packed with speeches or physical confrontations, and I could imagine the lights going down after each one. The story, regarding a chop-shop owner named Harry (Paul Leder) who sets up a customer named Ben (Will Gregory) as a fall guy for the police, serves mainly as an excuse to play assorted sleazy characters off one another.

Within this theatrical framework there are a number of unexpected performances, including the young Ms. McClanahan's surprisingly good turn as "Poochie," Harry's white-trash girlfriend. She brings a convincing sluttiness to the role, which could be considered a precursor to her aging nymphomaniac on **The Golden Girls**. However, top acting

honors go to King Moody (the alien commander from **Teenagers From Outer Space** and a former Ronald McDonald) as Blowhard, the voyeuristic junkyard worker ("I only done it with my eyeballs!") who attacks Ben's wife, and Norman Hartwig as a dope-smoking philosopher who spouts free-form observations such as "one rotten apple spoils the barrel, but the barrel is made of rotten apple cores!" (And that's one of his more coherent lines.)

The loose, rambling script (more like beat poetry than a typical story) and impressive cast are supported by great cinematography (including one incredible shot in which the camera follows Blowhard as he spins in an office chair) and moody direction from Hayes (**Grave Of The Vampire**), who brings a suitably bleak, hopeless atmosphere to the sordid proceedings.

Unfortunately, neither Hayes nor McClanahan were as assured in **Hollywood After Dark** (1965), their third collaboration (the first, 1961's **The Grass Eater**, is not yet on video). The movie begins promisingly enough, in yet another junkyard, as two crooks approach a mug named Tony (Anthony Vorno) about a robbery. Later, when Tony meets a stripper named Sandy Smith (McClanahan), the focus suddenly shifts to

their romance and her show-business ambitions. The robbery is forgotten until its abrupt re-entry more than halfway through the movie, at which point the love story takes a walk. It's as if Hayes couldn't tell the plot from the subplot, and so didn't develop either one satisfactorily.

Without a serviceable script, the actors don't fare very well. Leading actor Vorno, who was wonderfully creepy in *Help Wanted: Female*, is disappointingly bland here. McClanahan is much stiffer than in *The Rotten Apple*, and her strip routine is truly dull. In fact, all of the routines in *Hollywood After Dark* rank among the most unsexy in sexploitation history.



ABOVE: *The Golden Girls*' Rue McClanahan is "Poochie, the Girl From The Shack," in John Hayes' 1963 feature *The Rotten Apple*.

That said, *Hollywood After Dark* does have its moments. A monologue spoken by a movie extra trying to "stand out in the crowd" is interesting if out of place, and, as in *The Rotten Apple*, there are moments of creative black and white photography (most notably a fight scene lit by a lone lightbulb). Unfortunately, these high points do not offset the underdeveloped, uninvolved plot(s). Still, you might want to watch *Hollywood After Dark* if you have the perverse desire to glimpse one of the *Golden Girls* partially naked.

[The Rotten Apple and Hollywood After Dark

are available for \$23 each postpaid from Something Weird Video, Dept. E, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133.]

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Two Pages From History by Erich Mees

The events of 1993 must have had the legions of Betty Page fanatics covered with bruises from pinching themselves. Not only has the celebrated former pin-up model emerged from her so-called "exile," but *Something Weird Video*, with the help of David F. Friedman, uncovered two long-believed-lost burlesque films directed by Irving Klaw and starring the delightful Miss Page: *Teaserama* and *Varietease*.

As a reviewer, I'm faced with a slight difficulty: there's nothing to review here, at least not in the conventional sense. No plot, no acting...just women dancing in skimpy costumes, punctuated by the occasional bad comedy routine. That's all there is to either film, but let's face facts. That's all they really need.

Viewers expecting a massive display of bared flesh will be in for a disappointment. Neither Betty nor the other dancers (including Tempest Storm in *Teaserama* and Lili St. Cyr in *Varietease*) really strip or even tease that much (with Trudy Wayne a notable exception); in fact, there's a certain charm and innocence to this supposedly "racy" material. However, the biggest surprise is the revelation that Betty Page wasn't a particularly good dancer. Consequently, these rather poorly-staged routines fail to convey the charm of her pin-up photos.

As for the material between dance acts; well, the less said, the better.

These comedy routines were tired when filmed, and they haven't improved with age. However, there is a certain fascination in seeing Joe E. Ross (of "ooh ooh" fame) doing material that makes his work on *Car 54, Where Are You* look like Moliere by comparison. (Curiously, the *Teaserama* box promises that we will "see Gunther Toody imitate Marlon Brando," but nothing like that actually occurs in the movie.)

However, the most irksome element is one that wasn't present during either films' initial release. To discourage piracy, the video company flashes their logo in the corner of the screen during the scenes most likely to be copied (that is, every time Betty walks onstage). This tactic probably does discourage would-be pirates, but it's guaranteed to irritate all would-be viewers.

All in all, *Teaserama* and *Varietease* make for a mildly interesting experience in show-business nostalgia. Watching either film is like taking a time machine back to the Golden Age of Burlesque...and discovering it was actually tin. Still, if you're a true fan of Betty, nothing I can say will keep you away.

[*Teaserama* and *Varietease* are available for \$23 each postpaid from *Something Weird Video*, Dept. E, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133.]



Barely Historical

Exploitation guru Dave Friedman has observed that exploitation movies probably began when one of the inventors of the movie camera persuaded his girlfriend to drop her knickers. Two similarly themed nudie movies, *Sexy Proibitissimo* and *The Nine Ages Of Nakedness*, stake the claim that the scene was set long before the invention of the camera.

Sexy Proibitissimo (Something Weird Video), a 1963 Italian feature from producer Gino Mordini and director Marcello Martinelli, fancifully traces the evolution of the striptease from prehistoric days to a final interplanetary bump'n'grind. Cut down to 63 minutes from the 100 minute Italian original, the domestic release also contains footage shot in the U.S. by Lee Frost. *Sexy Proibitissimo* was distributed to adult theaters by Frost and Bob Cresse, whose Olympic International rode the "mondo" bandwagon of the mid-sixties with *Mondo Freudo*, *Mondo Bizarro*, *Ecco* (see review this issue), and others. To avoid any confusion over the title's meaning, Olympic expanded it in the ads to "*Sexy Proibitissimo: The Most Prohibited Sex*."

Unlike the U.S. striptease films of the fifties, *Sexy Proibitissimo* doesn't confine its action to one stage. Although one of its "nightclubs" looks suspiciously like a penthouse apartment, *Sexy Proibitissimo* is relatively elaborate in its settings, its dancers are attractive, and the mock-historical tone of the narration manages to be occasionally funny if at times lamentably passe ("It seems strange that there was ever a time women couldn't talk," in reference to cavewomen). Segments featuring the Frankenstein monster and Dracula are laughable camp, as is the depiction of Hercules' thirteenth "labor." An effects sequence in which a drunken sailor visualizes a stripper inside his rum bottle is surprisingly slick for a no-budgeter.

Unfortunately, the narrative has been compromised in the current video release. One sequence begins with the narrator's observation that "today, husbands never have these matrimonial disappointments." The statement reflects upon an earlier segment about how Puritan grooms must have occasionally been surprised by their brides' bodies on their wedding nights, having only previously seen them in clothing that obscured all but their faces. Apparently the reels were confused during the film to video transfer.



Nevertheless, *Sexy Proibitissimo* shames most of its contemporaries by offering style and humor along with its peekaboo skin show. A case in point: British director Harrison Marks' lame 1969 historical spoof *The 9 Ages Of Nakedness* (Media). This time, the filmmaker's presence casts a tiresome pall over the film's exploitive intentions.

In a style reminiscent of the late Benny Hill at his most self-indulgent, the sexually frustrated Marks, to the growing irritation of a justifiably rattled psychiatrist, traces his ancestry back through history. Thus we are introduced to caricatures of Marks in historical garb, perpetually surrounded by a bevy of naked women, pacing around cheaply-rendered sets that scarcely suggest their era of antiquity. Marks depicts the sexual escapades of his ancestors in the Stone Age, in ancient Egypt, and so on, concluding with a vision of the future. Unfortunately, his pathetic attempts at both humor and

eroticism are so dull that the nine generations appear to be occurring in real time. Several gags based on scenes from *Blow Up* are particularly cretinous.

So why watch *9 Ages Of Nakedness*? Residents of my home state of Virginia may get a kick out of trying to spot former model Patricia Kluge, the ex-wife of billionaire businessman John W. Kluge and purported paramour of former Virginia governor Doug Wilder, among the unclad extras. Now that Wilder has announced that he's dropped out of the race for the Virginia Senate, the former governor may have to content himself with Kluge's earlier, more public exposure.

[Sexy Proibitissimo is available for \$23 postpaid from Something Weird Video. Media no longer offers The 9 Ages Of Nakedness, but it's available for mail-order rental by ex-governors and everyone else of legal age at The Video Vault. Call 1-800-VAULT 66 for information.]

Zero In And...Snore

by Erich Mees

In the movies, if not in real life, sexual frustration and sniper murders go hand-in-hand. If a guy can't form a healthy relationship with a woman, he'll likely reach for the nearest semi-automatic weapon instead. First, there was the misogynistic title character in Edward Dmytryk's film noir *The Sniper*. The motivation behind the killing spree that opens Albert Zugsmith's *On Her Bed Of Roses* is suggested by the alternate title: *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Of course, the killer in *Targets* (the classic of the "sniper" subgenre) was an equal-opportunity slayer with no apparent motive, but even here the camera did tend to linger on the female victims.

Zero In And Scream (1970), produced by Lee Frost and directed by Les Emerson (Frost again), takes this pop psychology link between sex and violence to its logical conclusion: a sniper thriller with softcore sex (or a nudie with gunfire, depending on how you look at it). Any notion of "story" is minimal: Mike (Michael Stearns), a disturbed strip club patron, obsesses over a stripper named Susan (Dawna Rae), who rejects him at every turn. Meanwhile, Mike spends

his spare time spying on couples in flagrante delicto through his high-powered rifle scope, killing the men to somehow (it isn't explained) preserve the women's "purity."

The resulting mixture of sex and violence is a worst-of-both-worlds combination. The constant threat of murder during the sex scenes (filmed through a rifle scope matte) will make most armchair voyeurs uncomfortable, and there's not enough violent "payoff" in these scenes to satisfy the sadistic crowd. Other drawbacks include an abrupt ending as obvious as it is contrived, and a source print with irritating background noise in the soundtrack. The only real point of interest for sleaze fans is the distinctive cinematography of producer/director Frost (director of *Love Camp 7* and *The Thing With Two Heads*), but that's not enough for a recommendation.

[Zero In And Scream is available for \$23 postpaid from Something Weird Video, Dept. E, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133.]

Still Holding His Own

Though he's long been revered in the U.K. and in his native Australia, humorist Barry Humphries has yet to score big in the U.S. Most Americans who've heard of him at all know him as Dame Edna Everage, the Australian celebrity housewife and Humphries alter ego. The wickedly funny Dame Edna, who was a frequent guest on Joan Rivers' cancelled talk show and star of several television specials, barely managed a small cult following this side of the Atlantic, perhaps because straight Americans haven't demonstrated a fondness for comical drag queens since Flip Wilson's Geraldine character.

But to true fans, Humphries is also known for his perverse, and frequently cruel, satirical works. His notorious, out-of-print book *Bizarre* (Crown Publishers) predated the current interest in freaks of nature by twenty years, offering photos of hideously deformed sideshow stars along with passages from such decadent works as Gustave Mirbeau's grotesque 1899 novel *The Torture Garden*. Audiences at Humphries' live performances are frequently moved from laughter to cries of outrage.



LEFT: Australian satirist Barry Humphries as disgusting statesman Les Patterson. RIGHT: A victim of the dreaded virus H.E.L.P. From *Les Patterson Saves The World*.

But what separates Humphries from such domestic purveyors of bad taste as shock-jock Howard Stern is his deadly aim in striking down the defense mechanisms of civility without ever having to pander to morons. His Dame Edna may be a racist boor, but only so her erudite creator can best fathom the deep-seated fears and hatred of his audience. With its everyday racial and sexual tensions, America may not be prepared to laugh at Humphries' humor, which laughs back viciously.

Judging from its cool reception (direct to video), we weren't ready for the 1987 feature *Les Patterson Saves The World* (South Gate Entertainment). Written by Humphries and his partner Diane Millstead, *Les Patterson Saves The World* features another Humphries alter ego, the swinish, drunken Australian diplomat Sir Les Patterson.

In the opening scene, Sir Les (Humphries) commits a diplomatic faux pas worthy of Le Petomaine, for which he is delivered as a sacrificial peace offering to the cruel despot of "Abu Niviah," a fictitious Middle Eastern kingdom. His arrival coincides with a revolution led by Colonel Richard Godowni (Thaao Penghlis), and Sir Les' life is spared. As the new Australian ambassador to Abu Niviah, Sir Les learns from a French physicist, Dr. Charles Herpes (Henri Szeps), of a horrible virus that the doctor has dubbed H.E.L.P. (Herpetic Encephalitis of the Lymphatic Polyp). Although H.E.L.P. is indigenous to Abu Niviah, Colonel Godowni sets out to infect the free world by spraying the virus on toilet seats and then exporting them to the U.S. With America in the throes of the

fatal disease, Godowni plans to use Dr. Herpes' antidote as a bargaining chip for world domination. Will Sir Les intervene and stop this menace?

It hardly matters, for the real purpose of *Les Patterson Saves The World* is to serve as a forum for Humphries' irreverent humor, which observes no standard of decorum or respect. Indeed, Humphries' lowbrow comedy is more offensive than John Waters' output since *Deperate Living*. [In fact, Waters once angrily castigated *Film Threat* editor Chris Gore for planning to film a comedy about AIDS. One wonders what Waters would think of H.E.L.P.] Bob McCarron's revolting special effects for the virus victims (air bladders and a viscous, pus-like liquid) will turn the stomachs of delicate viewers.

Director George Miller (the other one) keeps the lowbrow gags moving along briskly, although this is creator Humphries' show. Ex-*Split Enz* keyboardist Tim Finn turns in an appropriately outre soundtrack, particularly one cocktail lounge number sung by Szeps in drag as Herpes' sister. One must also give credit to Humphries' pal Joan Rivers for accepting the role of President of the United States in this Aussie gagfest. It certainly didn't help her television career.

Racist, sexist, and in the poorest taste imaginable, *Les Patterson Saves The World* is an anomaly in these politically correct times. Humphries and Millstead's script manages to mow down practically every race, religion, and creed, making *Les Patterson Saves The World* a shoo-in for the title, "Movie Most Likely To Piss Off Everyone." Those who don't despise it may even want to watch it twice, as I did.

Knives and Nylons

by Erich Mees

Frank Henenlotter's remarkable *Sexy Shockers* series from Something Weird Video launched several lost cult wonders in its opening volley. Some of the titles in this series (including *The Awful Dr. Orloff*, *Horrors Of Spider Island*, and the mondo masterpiece which gave this fanzine its title) are legendary among fans, but just as many are forgotten or ignored gems fatefully rescued from obscurity. Such a case is John Bushelman's *Day Of The Nightmare* (1965), a creepy-crawly little number inspired by (read: ripped off from) *Psycho*.

Day Of The Nightmare is off to a rollicking start with two of the most unusual opening shots in exploitation movie history: the opening credits roll over a freeze-frame of a

screaming woman distorted by a funhouse mirror. Then, as the credits end, we are slammed from this haunting image into an extreme close-up of the navel of a gyrating dancer. Unfortunately, the movie doesn't quite live up to the lurid promise of this jarring juxtaposition.

Cliff Fields stars as Jonathan Crane, a sadistic/voyeuristic/(you name it)istic artist who is also somehow connected to a dangerous mystery woman named Doris Mays. When Doris apparently vanishes under suspicious circumstances, it's up to police detective Dave Harmon, played by John Ireland (yes, the John Ireland), to figure out the connection.

Of course, in the classic **Psycho/Homicidal** tradition, Jonathan and Doris are one and the same. (Don't worry, I'm not giving away anything that the box copy doesn't. Anyhow, it's not exactly **The Crying Game** we're talking about here.) It's no surprise, because Cliff Fields makes for a very bizarre-looking woman (although with the short wig and dark glasses "she" could be a Warhol Superstar).

There's a bit of cheating to his performance as well: all of Doris' dialogue is obviously dubbed in by a female voice rather than spoken by Fields.

Even given Fields' conspicuous turn as a female impersonator, **Day Of The Nightmare** remains an interesting effort. The scenes of sadism and perversion, while too



ABOVE: John Ireland as he appears in the 1965 shocker **The Day Of The Nightmare**.

overacted to be truly disturbing, manage to succeed on an over-the-top, campy level. Adding to the camp factor are cameos by Liz Renay (as a nympho patient of Jonathan's psychiatrist dad) and A.C. Stephens regular Forman Shane (in a suburban orgy scene). These unusual twists and in-joke cameos, as well as the participation of name actor Ireland, help distinguish **Day Of The Nightmare** from countless other exploitation flicks of the era.

But my biggest disappointment with **Day Of The Nightmare** had less to do with the movie itself than with my own expectations. Since the package didn't specify who played which part, I was

expecting John Ireland to be the cross-dressing psycho. Now that would have been twisted.

[**Day Of The Nightmare** is available for \$23 postpaid from *Something Weird Video*, P.O. Box 33664, Seattle, WA 98133.]

Bill Rogers: A Man Of Taste (Of Blood!)

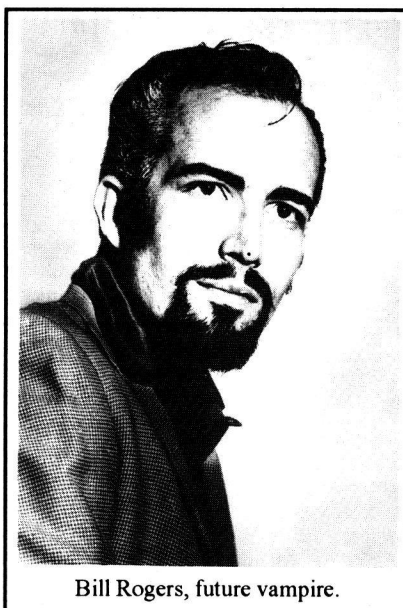
As aficionados of the absurd will eagerly attest, many a low-budget drama has been sucker-punched into the realm of camp by the limitations of its amateur "stars." But with their customarily rock-bottom finances, exploitation filmmakers could hardly lure familiar actors from Hollywood's talent pool. That's why regionally produced low-budget films, such as those made in Florida during the sixties and seventies, frequently starred stage performers from regional playhouses and dinner theaters. These modestly talented hopefuls were usually more eager for critical exposure than the nominal paycheck, forever hoping to be noticed onscreen by talent scouts who may never see them shine onstage in Sarasota.

The Florida independent filmmaking boom sputtered to an end during the seventies, its legacy a few television programs and dozens of cheaply made exploitation features. While a few veterans of the scene landed in Hollywood, most fell into careers with distribution outlets, network television affiliates, and the burgeoning cable industry. The actors who starred in these nearly forgotten programmers, or at least those whose love of acting kept them away from a steady job, seem to have either embarked upon abortive Hollywood careers or returned to community theatre.

For Bill Rogers, acting has never been a quest for fame or fortune, or even a steady income: it's a socially acceptable outlet for his own highly cultivated exhibitionism. And although Rogers approaches even low-budget fare with a professional actor's discipline, he has never fantasized that his dozens of critically acclaimed stage performances or the films he made for Herschell Gordon Lewis and K. Gordon Murray would lead to offers from Hollywood.

And they haven't, although Rogers hasn't been sitting around waiting. Among other pursuits, he's been inspiring fellow actors on stages

throughout Southern Florida while appearing (and singing!) in **My Fair Lady**, **The Fantasticks**, and others. His photography has graced magazine layouts as well as the portfolios of fashion models and exotic dancers, and his artwork has appeared in everything from official U.S. Air Force publications to advertisements. So how, then, did Rogers ever end up acting in films with titles such as **Shanty Tramp** and **The Girl, The Body, And The Pill**?



Bill Rogers, future vampire.

Recently ecco asked him, and discovered - as might be expected - that it all started in high school. While a student at Miami Senior High, Rogers appeared in the drama club's production of Thornton Wilder's **Our Town**. Through his friendship with Vic Knobloch, the owner of a small recording studio, Rogers wrote and recorded radio commercials for local businesses...including a proto-rap song for a company that installed automobile seat covers. Knobloch also introduced Rogers to his friends in the Miami Civic Theatre. Inactive for nearly a decade, the Miami Civic Theatre had in the thirties been the stage home of acting great Joseph Cotten. In 1949, a new incarnation of the Miami Civic Theatre - which now included nineteen-year-old Bill Rogers as a cast member - produced a live radio show similar in spirit to the popular **Inner Sanctum** series.

Entitled *Beyond The Veil*, the program was credited as being "from the imagination of Scott Bishop."

"I was playing all kinds of old poops there," recalls Rogers of the series. Along with middle-aged and older characters, the talented teen also filled in for "an assortment of strange critters." He recalls for one session holding a glass near his mouth to create "a reverb/echo effect for the voice of a sea creature." Rogers also remembers the time that an actor who was supposed to shout that he had glimpsed a fearsome ghost, the "pig-faced spectre of the rectory," instead blurted out that he had been startled by the horrible "pig-faced rectum of the spectory."

The following year, Rogers was given the role of a butler in the revamped Miami Civic Theatre's first on-stage production, *Susan And God*. Several original members of the group had contacted Cotten, who agreed to appear in the first two shows to help the troupe draw media attention. But after the successful run of *Susan And God*, Rogers quit the Miami Civic Theatre to join the air force, easing into a much-coveted position in the graphic arts branch of the USAF Security Service. Rogers distinguished himself by designing the branch's official command emblem. "My emblem was chosen over eight others, and was accepted at an official ceremony," recalls Rogers. "I was asked during the proceedings to explain the significance of the elements within the emblem's four quadrants. I wasn't thinking of any significance when I designed them, so I had to make up stuff on the spot." Rogers' phony explanations appeared in the official Security Service newspaper as well as in several air force regulation manuals.

After duty, Rogers resumed his acting sideline with a troupe of air force performers called the Kelly Players, also appearing in community theaters around San Antonio and then later in Topeka. By day, Rogers developed his sketching, drafting, and photography skills, and was rewarded by being assigned to Westover Air Force Base as photo officer for the entire 8th Air

Force. While stationed at Westover, Rogers appeared in *Visit To A Small Planet* and others. He also directed several plays, including the latter.

In 1961, ten years after he had enlisted, Rogers left the air force to return to Miami, where he worked in the art department of *The Miami News*. In the following years, Rogers also developed advertising for several Miami-based agencies. But the nine to five grind didn't allow him enough time for his creative endeavors or his stage roles, so Rogers eventually decided to quit his day job to exclusively accept freelance art and photography assignments. His involvement in local theater productions expanded, inspiring favorable notices in the Miami press. Memorable performances from Rogers in *Guest In The House* and in Somerset Maugham's *Rain* were singled out for praise from area critics.

Rogers' role in the latter led to his first paying job as an actor. Talent agent Marian Polan attended the play, and subsequently recommended Rogers as a double for actor Lee Patterson during filming of the second season (1961-62) of the television series *Surfside Six*. Though mostly filmed in Hollywood, the program was supposedly set in the Miami area and thus required flashes of Floridian flora and fauna. Rogers and three other local actors were filmed in long-shot scenes that were edited into the west coast footage, tricking viewers into

believing that the stars themselves were cruising around the Sunshine State.

During filming for *Surfside Six*, Rogers was introduced to exploitation legend K. Gordon Murray. A disciple of Kroger Babb, the penultimate movie showman, ex-carny Murray was raking in the green by importing fairy tales and horror movies from Mexico and then dubbing them into English for the kiddie matinee and drive-in circuit. (For more on Murray, see *ecco* #10 and 11). Murray was impressed with Rogers' rich baritone, and quickly tapped him for his versatile vocal abilities.

For the next three years, Rogers provided English-language dialogue for Murray's fantasy imports *Puss N' Boots*, *Little Red Riding Hood And Her Friends*, and others. He later dubbed many of Murray's horror imports, including such south-of-the-border favorites as *Curse Of The Doll People*, *Samson vs the Vampire Women*, *The Vampire's Coffin*, *The Living Head*, *The Robot vs The Aztec Mummy*, and *Invasion Of The Vampires*.

IT'S HAPPINESS FOR EVERYONE!

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See! Red Riding Hood with a band of roving gypsies! The fairy princess and her enchanted kingdom!

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At first Rogers worked on the kiddie films at a studio in Miami's Parkleigh Hotel on Biscayne Boulevard, but Murray later moved his operation to Soundlab Studios in nearby Coral Gables. Most of the horror imports were dubbed at the latter studio. The dubbing sessions were "directed" by Manuel San Fernando, Jose Prieto, and cameraman J.R. Remy, three Cuban expatriates, and by actor/film professor Paul Nagel and local actor Frank Schuler. (For more on Nagel, see Bill Kelley's interview and article in *Video Watchdog* #2). They were all instructed by Murray to match English words and phrases to the on-screen actors' lip movements rather than attempt a literal translation, a technique which helped eliminate the usual poor synchronization but added another problem: inane dialogue. Characters speak awkwardly in a strange, elliptical manner.

Because the films were dubbed in segments ("loops" in dubbing parlance), their titles and plots were sometimes obscured to the "voice" actors. For this reason, Rogers doesn't know how many films he dubbed for Murray. He does, however, recall the most memorable assignments, such as his multiple voices for *The Vampire's Coffin* (1965). His primary role in the latter film was as the mad scientist's creepy assistant Manion, who ultimately becomes the slave of the vampiric Count Lavud (Mexican horror star German Robles), but Rogers also lent his voice to assorted villagers and victims.

The same year, Rogers voiced both the hero and the villain's dialogue in Miguel Morayta's *The Invasion of the Vampires*, which concerned the efforts of young Dr. Albarán to stop a plague of vampirism spawned by the evil, bloodsucking Count Frankenhause. "I had to fight myself in that one," Rogers recalls. He also remembers the difficulties he and the technicians had in not laughing during one particular session for that film. Although the film's army of vampires have all had wooden stakes driven through their hearts in a previous scene, the undead bloodsuckers rise en masse from their tombs - stakes still piercing their chests - in defiance of conventional vampire lore. "We'd break up every

time we saw this one idiot," Rogers recalls, chuckling, "who was stumbling around with the point of the stake poking out from his back several inches lower than the front!"

Rogers also dubbed some of the Mexican horror films featuring the masked wrestler Santo, who was nicknamed "Samson" by Murray for his U.S. releases. In *Samson vs. the Vampire Women*, Rogers - as the Professor - answered his screen daughter's query about Samson's identity with a

typically oblique speech: "I don't think you'll ever know, but I'll say this, my dear. In this age where there are certain evil men who propose to destroy us, Samson is the example to men of goodwill who serve justice." It's awful, yes, but don't forget that the dialogue was written to match the actors' lip movements.

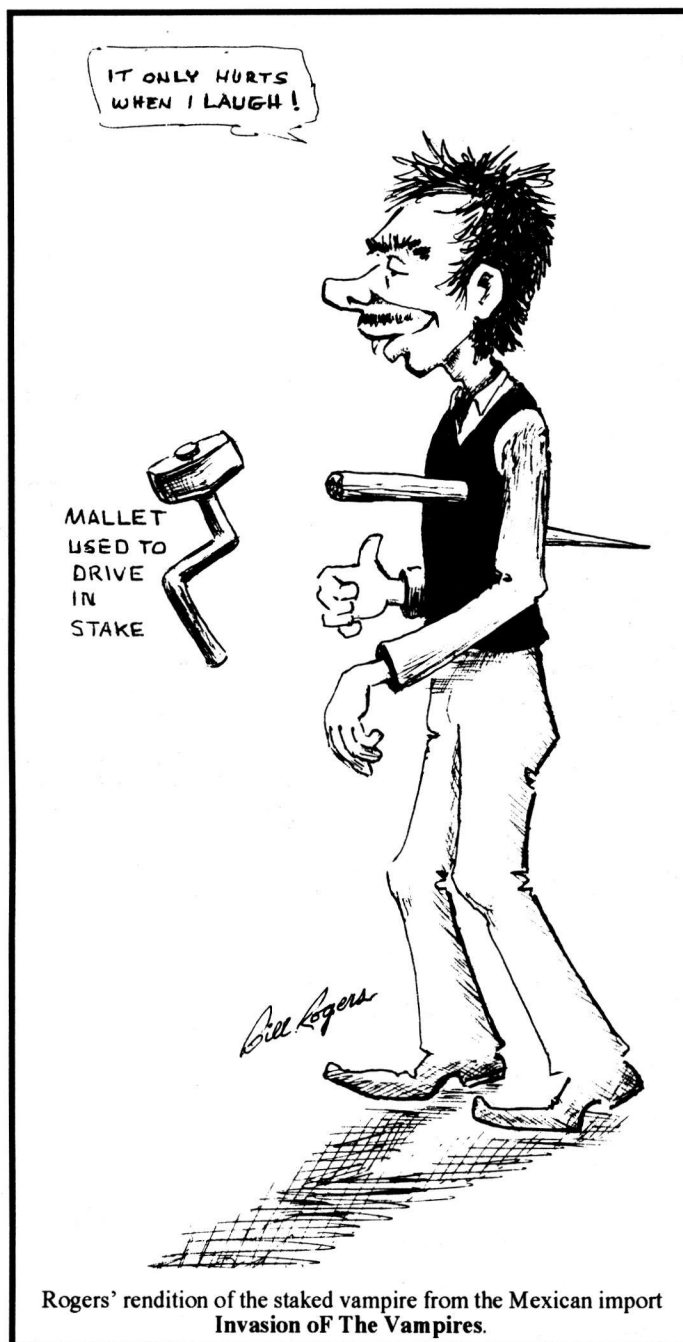
While overdubbing the exploits of Mexican vampires and superheroes, Rogers also provided English-language voices for characters from two black and white Japanese cartoons. The half-hour animated series *Astroboy* had been a success with stateside tots, leading U.S. producers to seek out more Japanese cartoons. *8th Man* was created in Japan in 1963 and dubbed into English the following year at Miami's Joe Oriolo Studios. The first episode was broadcast on September 7, 1965.

In the opening installment, special agent Peter Brady, a square-jawed law and order type, was left for dead by international criminal Saucer Lip. The agent's brain was salvaged and transferred to a robotic body by the aptly-named Professor Genius, who rechristened his android 8th Man. During the course of 52 episodes, 8th Man fought the evil spy organization Intercrime with the aid of his ally, Police Chief Fumblethumbs.

Those who were hired to dub the cartoon's primary characters were committed to long-term contracts to assure the producers that the main voices wouldn't vary. Because of his theatrical commitments, Rogers was unwilling to make such a promise. Consequently, he dubbed many of the

program's evildoers, and was the voice of an android controlled by the professor's son Ken in one episode.

A decidedly unspectacular example of early Japanese animation, *8th Man* doesn't hold up to scrutiny. In one episode, Professor Genius comments on 8th Man's superior





"electronic" brain, despite the initial episode's revelation that the brain belongs to agent Brady. Perhaps for such sloppiness, **8th Man** is largely forgotten today but for the die-hard fans who have purchased the two volumes available from Video Rarities. Also consigned to the collector scrap heap is **Prince Planet**, a science fiction cartoon series set in the 21st century that appeared the following year.

Prince Planet, who also answered to "Bobby," was an emissary from the planet Radion. The

Radion-based Universal Peace Corps had sent Bobby to Earth to fight monsters and madmen from beyond our galaxy. As the superhero Prince Planet, Bobby fought fiendish villains, many with the voice of Bill Rogers, in 52 thrill-packed, syndicated episodes.

The forgettable **Prince Planet** was dubbed at Miami's Copri Studios on Flagler Street, where Rogers had previously added incidental voices for Murray's Mexican imports. Chris Nagel, the son of Murray dubbing director Paul Nagel, spoke the role of Hadji Baba, a turbaned magician who rode a flying carpet. The voice of Prince Planet was provided by Bobbie Byers, a Florida actress who later appeared in Murray's *Savages From Hell* and William Greife's *The Wild Rebels*. The English-language dialogue for **Prince Planet** was written by actor/screenwriter Reuben Guberman, who co-wrote the sleaze classic *Shanty Tramp* with Murray several years later. The

cartoon's executive producers were James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff, whose American International Television productions also syndicated Murray's Mexican imports in the U.S.

Rogers' voice also made a guest appearance that year as an unseen Coast Guard radio operator on an episode of *Flipper*, the popular television series from Florida that featured a marine mammal as its titular star. He was also heard in local radio commercials, some of which he also wrote, and portrayed a trenchcoat-clad James Bond knock-off for a *London Fog* trade show.

In 1963 Rogers was hired by Hal Pearl, a guy who often claimed to have written the original story for *Dumbo* but been cheated by Disney, to create an advertising campaign for a nudie movie entitled *Sextet*. The low-budget comedy starred Miami-based comedian Pauly Dash as a Mr. Teas surrogate who dreams of oriental beauties eager to please him. "He was terrible," Rogers admits, but concedes that audiences weren't paying to see Dash

anyway. The dream sequences were filmed inside a staggeringly huge houseboat (with a full-size, indoor swimming pool) owned by Miami Beach millionaire Harold Chaskin. *Sextet* was re-released by Juan Hidalgo-Gato and Joseph Fink's Thunderbird Films (*Sting Of Death*) the following year.



Between the dubbing and stage work, Rogers photographed dancers, fashion models, and theatrical performers in portfolio layouts. He also designed and shot the album cover for the comedy record *The Royal Family* (a spoof of Liz Taylor, who had just dumped Eddie Fisher for Richard Burton while filming *Cleopatra*) from "blooper" king Kermit Schafer. As with *Sextet*'s nudie sequences, the album cover was photographed on Harold Chaskin's houseboat. The record



was distributed by Cincinnati's *King Records* (James Brown's label).

Rogers appeared in a walk-on role in the Harry Kerwin production *Adam Lost His Apple* (1965), an Earl Wainright nudie that starred his friend Gene Berk. H.G. Lewis actor Mal Arnold also had a small role in the film, the tale of an independently wealthy photographer who takes a cruise (on producer Tom Dowd's boat "The Dowdpro") and discovers a man and two women shipwrecked on an island in the

TWO YEARS IN PRODUCTION! ADAM HAD THE APPLE ... AND EVERYONE WANTED IT!

ADAM LOST HIS APPLE

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 • LITTLE HARBOR, BAHAMAS

Bahamas. Now living as happy, healthy nudists (albeit with bathing suit marks), the trio refuse to return to society.

Amazed at the film's inept script, Rogers decided that he could write a better movie. *The Adultresses*, his original script for a softcore sex film, was, to quote Rogers, "wordy as hell." It was also written under the assumption that the dialogue would be of importance to its target audience. Nevertheless, Rogers' neighbors, two would-be movie moguls from Salt Lake City, expressed interest in producing *The Adultresses*. With a copy of Rogers' script in hand, the two "investors" abruptly moved back to Utah and dropped correspondence. To Rogers' knowledge, *The Adultresses* remains unfilmed, either "hot" (nudity) or "cold" (no nudity).

In 1966, Rogers was hired as the still photographer for *The Devil's Sisters* by Florida movie director William Greffe. Offering his professional best, Rogers meticulously posed his subjects on the movie set, slowing down the low-budget production and incurring the wrath of assistant director Robert Schneider. "They canned me and hired some other guy," admits Rogers, "but many of the photos they used in their campaign were mine." Indeed, the drawing of actress Sharon Saxon peering through the railing of a brass bed, the primary image in the film's ads, was sketched from one of Rogers' stills.

At night, Rogers was appearing in theater productions



around the Miami area, performing in critically acclaimed plays such as George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* and in an unusual production of *The Drunkard*. His singing duet with costar Kay Daphne in the latter led one reviewer to dub them "the poor man's Nelson Eddy and Jeannette McDonald." But the one stage role most responsible for leading Bill Rogers into the shadowy realm of exploitation filmmaking was that of "El Gallo" in...*The Fantasticks*.

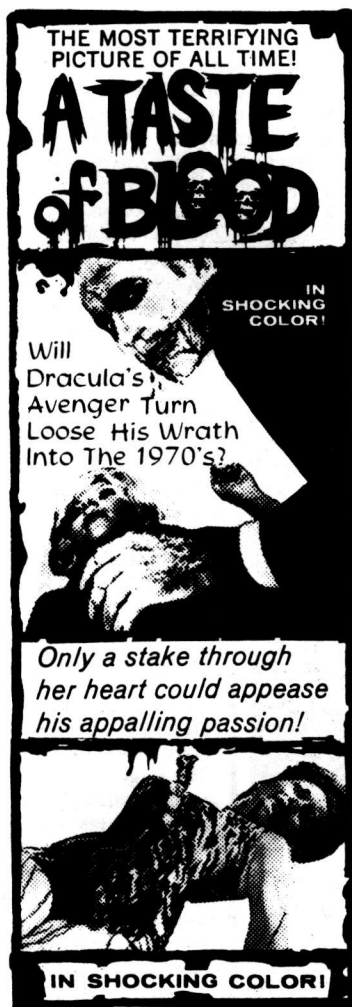
The Merry-Go-Round Playhouse in Coral Gables hosted matinees of kiddie plays, but theater director Ivan Kivitt (who had overseen dubbing for several of the early K. Gordon Murray fairy tales), occasionally offered grown-up fare in the evenings. Kivitt's production of the popular musical *The Fantasticks* opened on November 11, 1966, and was greeted

with critical acclaim by the local media. A Chicago-based movie director who was casting for a horror movie to be made around Miami asked Kivitt for suggestions. The stage director recommended three of the *Fantasticks* cast members to the filmmaker, who promptly signed them to appear in his movie. The three were Bill Rogers, Eleanor Vaill, and Ted Shell. The filmmaker was H.G. Lewis, the Godfather of Gore, and the movie was *A Taste Of Blood*.

In early 1967, Lewis brought down a technical crew from Chicago to begin initial filming. Rogers was cast as John Stone, the descendant of Count Dracula. Vaill and Schell portrayed Stone's secretary Hester and the ill-fated Lord Gold, respectively. The cast also included Bill (Rooney) Kerwin, a Lewis favorite; Chicago actor Otto Schlesinger from the rare 1966 Lewis feature *An Eye For An Eye*; Miami stage actor Lawrence Tobin; actress Elizabeth Wilkinson, who later appeared in



ABOVE: The cast of the 1966 production of *The Fantasticks*. The three hired by H.G. Lewis for *A Taste Of Blood* were: Bill Rogers (fifth from left), Eleanor Vaill (sixth from left), and Ted Schell (seventh from left).



Lewis' **Suburban Roulette**; and nudie star Dolores Carlos, whom Rogers had met years earlier at a photo shoot. [Rogers also recalls that he had suggested the title **Naked Complex** to Carlos for the so-named 1963 nudie film she produced and starred in.]

Often considered Lewis' most technically proficient achievement, the two-hour **A Taste Of Blood** unquestionably features his most impressive sets and production values. Lewis himself displayed admirable resourcefulness in selecting the film's effective locations. The game room of a Miami Beach hotel became the interior of Lord Gold's parlor; the parlor's exterior was a Tudor-styled house in Miami's fashionable Coconut Grove district.

One Miami location proved to be a problem to Lewis and his crew. The vampire's hideout, actually a vacant bathhouse, was the setting for a late-night clash between the film's vampire and Miami

lawmen. After shooting the confrontation, the sound crew decided to record actual gunshots for the sound mix. It was four a.m., and the noise panicked nearby residents who promptly called the Miami police. "Half a dozen cop cars pulled up," Rogers recalls. "Luckily, the cops Lewis hired to appear in the movie had already left."

Some of the film's actors provided further obstacles. Dolores Carlos was supposed to be "stabbed" by Rogers and then fall into her swimming pool, all in one take. Despite the presence of Lewis' crew just out of frame, Carlos, who was afraid of drowning, could not plunge into the waist-deep water without flailing about. Her fear necessitated using an ineffective cut-away showing her as she hits the surface, arms akimbo.

Regardless of Carlos' fear of water, Rogers considers **A Taste Of Blood** to be the best film of his limited screen career. He enjoyed the filming, managing to find time for a few practical jokes with other cast members between takes. One morning Rogers was joking with a technician while the man was finishing with the details of Stone's coffin, which was propped up on sawhorses in a Miami motel room. When the two men heard the cleaning staff approaching, an evil plan was hatched. The technician ran into the bathroom as Rogers climbed into the coffin and lowered the lid. As the poor woman entered the room, Rogers groaned loudly from inside the coffin while slowly raising the lid. "She almost made another door in the wall," Rogers chuckles sardonically.

After filming **A Taste Of Blood**, Rogers fielded queries from family and friends about his role. "When I told one guy that I had played a vampire, he asked me if they had put a stake

through my heart," recalls Rogers. "'No,' I told him, 'the movie was so low budgeted they used a hamburger.'" Nevertheless, Rogers awarded **A Taste Of Blood** a permanent position on his resume.

Rogers' next film was the first "filmed in Florida" production from his old boss K. Gordon Murray, who had decided to shoot drive-in movies at Luke Moberly's studio in Davie. **Shanty Tramp** was filmed in the spring of 1967 and given a world premiere in Buffalo, New York that summer. It subsequently stirred up the forces of censorship more than Murray could have ever predicted, which may explain why none of his successive films were as shocking. The black-and-white cheapie was an eye-popping parable with biblical reverberations, bloody violence, interracial sex, and topless patricide. To some audiences, the film's most offensive scene involved the seduction of a naive black teenager by a promiscuous white woman. The segment was especially grating to southern audiences, who were implicitly condemned as racists by subsequent events in Murray and Reuben Guberman's lurid, pessimistic script.

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ABOVE: As a randy backwoods revivalist, Rogers makes time with Eleanor Vaill (aka Lee Holland) as his assistant watches in disgust. From the ultra-sleazy sixties' skinfest **Shanty Tramp**. Photo courtesy of Bill Rogers.

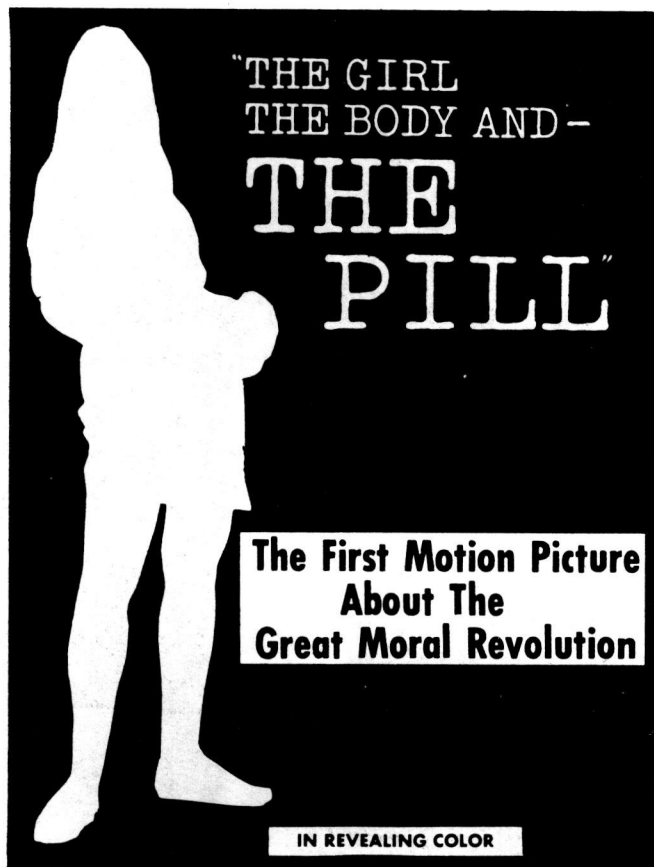
Rogers portrayed a lustful evangelist whose tent revival is a symbol for the film's dual themes of hypocrisy and spiritual decay. **Shanty Tramp** also featured several of Rogers' co-stars from **A Taste Of Blood**, most of whom chose to use pseudonyms in the credits. Eleanor Vaill, who portrayed the title character, a scheming slut who sells herself to lowlifes for five dollars, appeared as "Lee Holland." Otto Schlesinger hid under a false name as Vaill's father, the town drunk. Lawrence Tobin, the leader of the motorcyclists, bravely used his actual name in the credits. Other cyclists were portrayed by Davie police officers, later dismissed from service when superiors discovered their involvement in an "adults only" feature film.

When not acting, Eleanor Vaill was a substitute schoolteacher in Miami. School-marmish in demeanor, she was far from the evil slattern of the role. Rogers recalls how both he and director Jose Prieto minced across the street to demonstrate to the bemused Vaill, who had been convincing as a naive sixteen-year-old in **The Fantasticks**, how she should swing her hips for the film's opening credit sequence. The treacherous harlot's teenage victim was effectively portrayed by Ray Aranha, now a respected playwright and actor. Despite his use of a pseudonym in the film's credits, Aranha was threatened with the loss of his job as a parole officer when the film played local theaters. In fact, an article in the **Miami Herald** described how the Miami premiere of **Shanty Tramp** resulted in a county ordinance forbidding the admission of minors to

"adults only" fare. Vaill probably would have lost her job as schoolteacher had she not already left for Chicago with co-star Otto Schlesinger, whom she later married. Their romance had blossomed during **A Taste Of Blood**.

Later that year, Rogers also left for Chicago at the request of Lewis, who cast him in a non-horror feature. **The Girl, The Body, And The Pill** combined teenage delinquency with sex education, abortion, and religious fundamentalism. Rogers portrayed Wesley Nichols, a reactionary school board member who opposes sex education. "The part was written for Bill Rogers," recalls Lewis, "if he wanted it." If Rogers had no other achievement in his lifetime, being flown to and from Chicago by Lewis, known for his ridiculously slim budgets, represents a coup in the world of cheap entertainment.

Lewis' investment was rewarded: Rogers' Wesley Nichols is the embodiment of self-righteous fanaticism, an unwielding facade hiding a compulsive sinner beneath. For comeuppance, Nichols is seduced by Irene Hunt (Valedia Hill), an alcoholic single mother who plots with him to stop an earnest high-school teacher (Pamela Rhea) from conducting evening sex education classes in her own home. When Hunt becomes pregnant and submits to a back-alley abortionist, Nichols, in admitting his guilt, is forced to abandon the moralistic persecution of his own wife and daughter.



Allison Louise Downe's campy screenplay is alternately sleazy and hilarious. Scenes of Hill and her promiscuous daughter (Nancy Lee Noble) screaming invective at one another anticipate John Waters. Viewers in their thirties and older will be fascinated by the movie's unwitting role as a time capsule of embarrassing fashion memories. But despite the ugliest clothes ever seen in a movie that doesn't star William Shatner, the campy *The Girl, The Body, And The Pill* is among the most entertaining of Lewis' non-horror sixties' features.

Rogers' next film project originated through a conversation with a local photographer named Len Campanella, who had been given a role in the sexploitation film *Judge The Wild Queen* (1969). Campanella suggested Rogers to the movie's director/producer, Al Doucette. Rogers was cast as Steve Randell, a lecherous beauty contest manager who falls in love with a contestant (Marilyn Nordmann, a former Miss Alabama who later wed Florida socialite Bruce Friedman in an underwater ceremony conducted in the swimming pool of a Miami hotel) but loses her to a lesbian (Gayl Ames, a/k/a Mrs. Al Doucette). To the sorrow of smitten Steve, the sinister Sapphire subsequently steers the soiled sorority sister into selling herself as a "party girl."

The pressbook includes several articles, optimistically intended as filler for newspapers, about the making of *Judge The Wild Queen*. One concerned Rogers' reluctance to actually slap Ames' face for a scene in the film. "That's not true! She couldn't fake a slap so we had to do it for real," Rogers insists. Another profiled Rogers' career, captioning a photograph of his character from the stage play *Trader Horn* as if it were from *A Taste Of Blood*. The article's heading inferred that *Judge The Wild Queen* was Rogers' eighth film role, a statistic derived by creative counting.

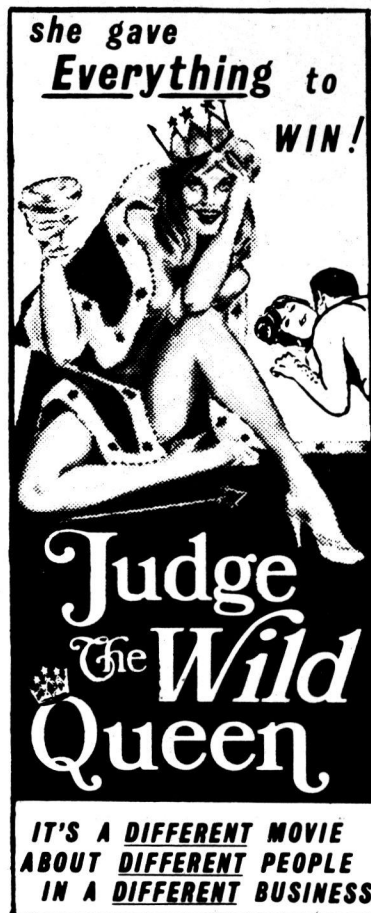
During a visit to the Moberly studio facilities in Davie that same year, Rogers ran into glamour photographer Bunny Yeager, whom he had previously met at one of her annual Artists And Models Balls. Yeager asked Rogers if he would fill in for an actor who had failed to appear for his role in a nude movie she was filming that day. Rogers agreed, earning \$50 and a credit in the film just by poking his head through a door and rattling off a line. The title of Yeager's film was *Sextet*, although it had nothing to do with the earlier nude movie of the same name. This *Sextet*, written and directed by Yeager's husband Bud Irwin, was an anthology of six stories, each with a different cast. The vignettes featured nude queen Terri Juston, future porn star manager Chuck Traynor, and someone named Mike Douglas. Rogers' segment, "*Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe*," concerned a nerdy scientist who invents a serum that brings back such historical babes as Marie Antoinette, Pocahontas, and Cleopatra as his obedient love slaves.

Next, Rogers again tried his hand at writing a movie script, this time for producer Al Doucette. *Fangley Toombs: Vampire* was to be a softcore sex comedy about an inept bloodsucker who suffers from "bitus interruptus" when his nubile victims crave his fangs in places other than their throats. In one scene, Rogers has Fangley prowling an orgy for prospective blood donors. When he spots one comely damsel writhing on the floor as an offscreen partner goes down on her, Fangley attempts to get his dream woman's telephone number. But the blissful beauty finds conversation difficult under the distracting circumstances, and Fangley interprets an "ohhh" of passion as a zero in her number. Rogers ended his script happily by having Fangley wed the female employee of a blood bank.

After watching some of Doucette's disappointing footage, however, Rogers lost interest in the project and dropped out of touch. He's not even certain that *Fangley Toombs: Vampire*

was ever completed, but suspects that it may have been turned into a hardcore feature and released under another title. At any rate, Rogers is doubtful that it would have been very good. "He (Doucette) didn't have any idea how to film the gags to their best advantage," Rogers recalls. "It was frustrating to see them ruining every joke in my script. Now if I could have directed it myself..."

The following year, Rogers was introduced to yet another Florida filmmaker, the notorious Brad Grinter, who offered him a role in his current production *Flesh Feast*. The genesis of the project was typically wacko Grinter. Faded



"REALLY SLAP ME," SHE SAID ... AND HE DID!

a red face makes for a realistic slap

During the shooting of "*Judge The Wild Queen*" a scene that required repeated retakes was a fight scene in which the lesbian CHRISTINE, played by GAYL AMES, is slapped hard by BILL ROGERS after Chris brags that she has stolen the young contest winner, TERI, away from BILL.

BILL IS NOT
A LADY SLAPPER

In take after take the director was unhappy with the results after Bill, who is really not a lady-slapper, repeatedly missed Gayl with his open palm by too wide a margin or, where his hand actually hit her he "pulled" the punch too much and the realism was not there.

"REALLY SLAP ME"

On the sixth take GAYL who is an "anything for the cause" girl (see story below) urged Bill, "For God's sake Bill, this time don't miss. Really slap me - I can take it."

So Bill did. He winced but he hit her hard and she went down with a shrill cry of pain. The scene was a "take." A measure of its realism was her yelp of pain and the fact that much later in the effects editing of the picture the original slap sound as picked up by the dialogue mike was used.

Gayl rubbed her red cheek and stared hard at Bill for a moment. Then she grinned and asked softly, "By the way Bill, are there any scenes coming up later where I slap you?"



"REALLY SLAP ME - MAKE IT REAL," she said

film star Veronica Lake, who had fallen on hard times in New York, had been invited to appear in a Miami dinner theater production of *Goodbye Charlie*. Lake was somehow introduced to Grinter, who managed to talk her into appearing in one of his noxious films. Their first and last project was 1970's *Flesh Feast* (working title: *Time Is Terror*), the gruesome tale of a famous plastic surgeon (Lake) whose new skin grafting procedure employs flesh-eating maggots to remove old or diseased layers of skin. The surgeon's final operation turns into sickening revenge when Lake discovers that the anonymous patient is none other than Adolph Hitler! Lake's mother, you see, had died at the hands of Nazi experimenters, and she seeks to even the score by turning her hungry maggots loose on der Fuehrer (Otto Schlesinger).

Besides Lake, *Flesh Feast* starred Miami area actor Phil Philbin, who was a Major in the Miami police department when he made the film but was later demoted, reportedly for strolling through the station in his undershorts. As in his other movies, Grinter himself was one of *Flesh Feast*'s cast members. Rogers portrayed Max Bauer, a scarred gangster sent as a guinea pig by a neo-Nazi group. Ironically, after overdubbing a multitude of characters in so many imported potboilers, Rogers was to later discover that Max Bauer's voice had been dubbed by someone else. Along with his role, Rogers also did some of the film's make-up (including Hitler) and served as still photographer. He later discovered that Grinter had "lost" several rolls of film; Rogers' most meticulously posed negatives disappeared.

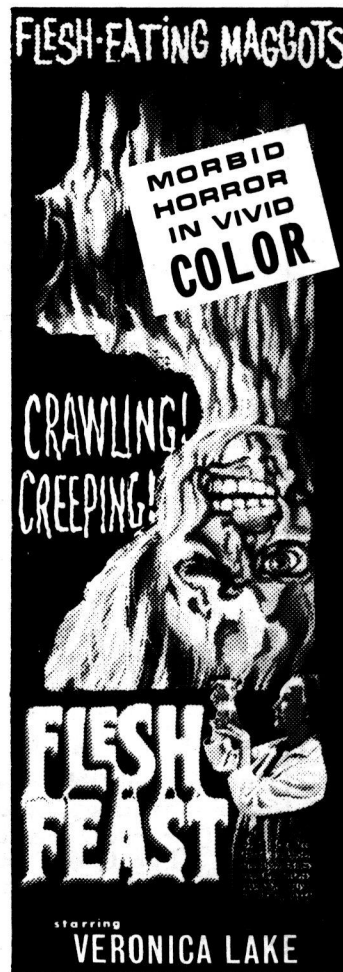


Flesh Feast was Bill Rogers' last movie role, although he continues to appear in stage productions around Bradenton, where he now lives. Last year he received rave reviews for his roles in the British farce *There Goes The Bride* and in the Joseph Steiner/Carl Reiner comedy *Enter Laughing*, both at the Venice Little Theatre. He recently appeared at the same theater in a critically acclaimed production of *Come Blow Your Horn*, and is currently rehearsing for the comedy *Lend Me A Tenor*. But although he loves the thrill of performing for a live audience, Bill Rogers is the first to admit that there's no money in local theater, that it's merely a demanding hobby. His other pastimes, photography and drafting, are both more profitable.

Rogers' greatest motivation for making money these days is his love of vintage cars. He has a '67 Thunderbird, a '60 Jaguar Mark Nine sedan (which he's having restored), and a '69 Mustang fastback that he's trying to sell to help pay for the Jaguar's restoration. Before long he'll be able to cruise in his Mark Nine over to Tampa to catch some jai alai, which he enjoys almost as much as acting.

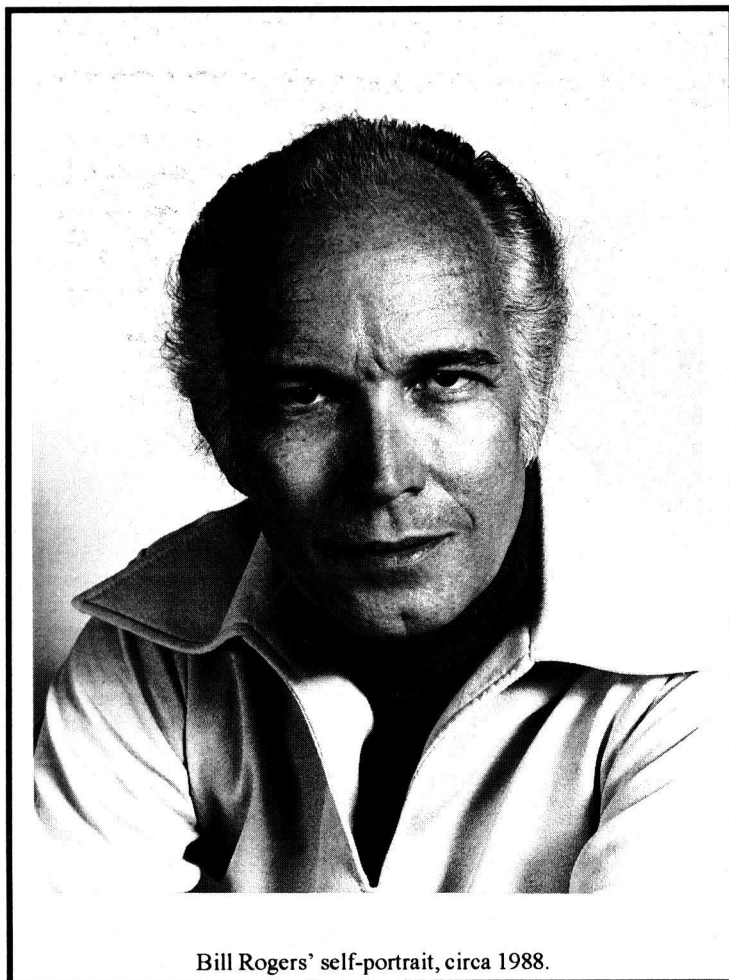
Does Rogers miss appearing in movies? Not really, he claims, although he admits enjoying his old roles on home video. He recently replied to a call for extras for a new movie by French director Jean-Charles Tacchella (*Cousin Cousine*) "with Molly Ringworm" in production nearby. Rogers arrived at the crew set-up on St. Armand's Circle

(Sarasota's version of Rodeo Drive) at 6:30 a.m. the morning of the shoot, and was given a non-speaking role as the "man holding package." Six hours later, after being told by crew members that he would be waiting for at least several hours more, the "man holding package" surrendered his parcel and went home.



Bill Rogers Videography

- Curse Of The Doll People (Sinister Cinema)
- Samson vs The Vampire Women (Sinister Cinema)
- The Vampire's Coffin (Sinister Cinema)
- The Living Head (Sinister Cinema)
- The Robot vs The Aztec Mummy (Sinister Cinema)
- Invasion Of The Vampires (Sinister Cinema)
- 8th Man, Volumes 1 and 2 (Video Rarities)
- Prince Planet (?)
- Adam Lost His Apple (Something Weird Video)
- A Taste Of Blood (Something Weird Video)
- Shanty Tramp (Gore Gazette)
- The Girl, The Body, & The Pill (Something Weird)
- Flesh Feast (World Video)



Bill Rogers' self-portrait, circa 1988.

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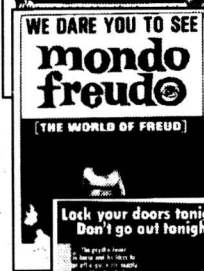
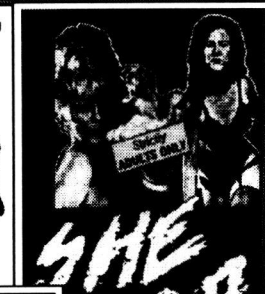
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